This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

AL
3621
713.2B
WIDENER
HN NV25 F

Monsieur d'en Brochette

A·H·FOLWELL
B·L·TAYLOR
J·K·BANGS

Digitized by Google

3621.713.2
B

HARVARD COLLEGE
LIBRARY

BOUGHT FROM THE
AMEY RICHMOND SHELDON
FUND

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

"This is his picture, really and truly."

Digitized by Google

MONSIEUR D'EN BROCHETTE

BEING

An Historical Account of Some of the Adventures of Huevos Pasada Par Agua, Marquis of Pollio Grille, Count of Pate de Foie Gras, and Much Else Besides.

BY

BERT LESTON TAYLOR

ARTHUR HAMILTON FOLWELL

AND

JOHN KENDRICK BANGS

ILLUSTRATED BY FRANK A. NANKIVELL

NEW YORK

MCMV

KEPPLER & SCHWARZMANN

Digitized by Google

AL 3621.713.2
V B

HARVARD COLLEGE LIBRARY
SHELDON FUND
JULY 10, 1940

Copyright, 1905, by KEPPLER & SCHWARZMANN

Digitized by Google

Contents

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	In which Count Paté de Foie Gras of En Brochette has a strange adventure with an unknown lady	1
II.	In which there is something doing	17
III.	In which I get out of a well and into a select chateau	31
IV.	In which I make a startling discovery	45
V.	In which the hero acquires a title	56
VI.	In which there are dukes and dukes	67
VII.	In which a great historical mystery is solved	83
VIII.	In which the Chevalier de Brie connects with what was coming to him	96
IX.	In which there are live and dead ones	108
X.	In which the king takes a hand	122
XI.	La Beldam Sans Merci and La Belle Isabelle	135
XII.	In which there are doings on the stair	148
XIII.	In which Monsieur d'en Brochette brings to a close the first volume of his incomparable memoirs	163
XIII.	In which appear two portraits plus a family heirloom	169
XIII.	In which our hero sees his finish	174

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

MONSIEUR D'EN BROCHETTE

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER I.

In Which Count Paté de Foie Gras of En Brochette has a Strange Adventure with an Unknown Lady.

F at twenty minutes past eleven o'clock on the morning of the fifth Monday of March, 1684, anybody had accosted me as I sat in the large window on the Rue de June Fourteenth side of the Café D'Œuf, in the fifteenth Arondissement of the Quartier Latin, Paris, France, and offered me even so little as a sou for my thoughts, I should, on my honor as a gentleman, have closed the bargain then and there if perchance the sale were for ready money, for to confess the sorry truth, I, Huevos Pasada par Agua, Count of Paté de Foie Gras and Marquis Presumptive of the Estates of Pollio Grille in Spain, just arrived after an eventful journey from the paternal acres of En Brochette, had naught within my purse, nor for that matter in the saddle bags resting athwart the shoulders of my tried and trusty steed Gambetta, now restlessly champing his crupper buckle in full view of the merry

Digitized by Google

breakfasters who surrounded me on all sides, with which to pay the reckoning of my host. I had breakfasted well, as the small slip lying upon the immaculate napery before me attested, calling as it did for an immediate payment of two hundred and fifty-seven francs thirty centimes, without taking into account the *quartier* which Henri the affable *valet de place*, who had served me well, expected to receive as the price of his good will. It was an awkward moment, albeit not unanticipated, for I had entered the place with the full knowledge that save my wits I had nothing with which to square the account.

I had hoped when the demands of my appetite — I had eaten nothing since leaving the castle ten days before — I had hoped, I say, when the demands of my large appetite — for I was, in very truth, upon the verge of starvation from so long an abstinence — I had hoped, I repeat, that by the time my hunger was appeased, by playing the swashbuckler I could have myself summarily ejected from the café without being called upon to pay, but to my consternation my boisterous behavior served only to increase the consideration with which I had already been received. Nothing that I could say or do seemed to surprise the managers or the menials of the eating place. I had declared the wines not fit to drink. I had thrown the Royal

Digitized by Google

"I had run the head-waiter through with my rapier."

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Worcester egg cup to the floor, declaring that eggs should be eaten only from Sevres of the resilience of cobwebs. I had run the head-waiter through with my rapier and wiped the blade upon the cloth of a neighboring table at which three ladies sat, and had in every other wise done my best to secure my forcible removal, but in vain. Each roisterous ebullition but served to show me in the eyes of those self-centered people to be more and more surely a gentleman of quality. It did not seem that by any human possibility I could escape the gendarmerie, which would have been fatal to my hopes and ambitions, for it was only with the idea that I might some day become the Captain of the King's Police that I had come to Paris, with a letter to my father's old friend Guillaume De Very, who held that exalted office at the time of which I write. De Very and my father, the Sieur de Foie Gras, had served together in many a bloody campaign under Charlemagne and Pepin the Little, but of late years they had drifted apart, and though the old friendship was strong and had been kept up by correspondence, the two had not seen each other since the Battle of Firenzi in the War of the Tulips, when they had parted just before the final charge which placed the laurels of victory upon the banners of the Duc de Maitre d'Hotel, Commander-in-Chief of the forces of Pepin. I cud-

Digitized by Google

gelled my brain for some ingenious way out of my present scrape, but alas, the situation grew more complex with each moment of reflection. To gain time for further cogitation I called Henri to my side by rapping upon the window-sill with my dagger.

"Another platter of *gateaux des pans*," I cried. "And have them better done than the last, my man, else will I slit thee into twins with this —" tapping the hilt of my rapier.

As I spoke, a silvery laugh, unmistakably the laugh of a beautiful blonde, but patrician withal, as I could tell from its rippling cadences, broke upon the stillness of the café from behind me. Turning quickly, my eyes rested upon the most beautiful woman I had ever seen — her eyes had the liquid cerulean tint of a Mediterranean wave charged with the colors of heaven; beside her lips the ripest cherry seemed but an acid bit of saffron; her profile which was turned toward me suggested the supervision of the sculptor of the Venus of Milo when the gods designed her nose and brow and chin — for the rest, since she sat at table I could but divine it, yet was I confident that even were her figure that of some charwoman, there had been lavished upon her face enough of beauty to blind the most fastidious to all other imperfections. But alas! All this beauty instead of thrilling my soul with happiness turned

Digitized by Google

to gall every bit of sweetness in my heart, for I perceived at once that her laughter had been evoked by some slighting allusion to my horse, Gambetta, and when from those lips there dropped the words in Spanish, "I guess he 's faster tied than loose," my rage knew no bounds, for Gambetta and I have been friends these many years, bound together by a comradeship beside which the vaunted friendships of Peleas and Melisandre, Castor and Pollux — aye of Ossa and Pelion themselves — pale into coldness — mere partnerships into which the affairs of the heart never enter. My rage knew no bounds, I say, and springing to my feet I again summoned the waiter.

"Henri!" I cried, with that haughty arrogance that I must confess becomes me well.

"*Si*, signor. *Oui*, Monsieur. *Yah*, Mein Herr. Here, sir," he replied.

"My card, Henri — to yonder haughty beauty — ask her name, or better the name of her father, her brother, her lover, her fiancé, her attorney — any man of prowess to whom I may throw down my glove demanding satisfaction for this insult," I cried haughtily. "I admit Gambetta's faults, but he shall not become an object of ridicule at any fair lady's hands, however beautiful. His spavins have been earned in valiant service to his master and his King. That

Digitized by Google

glander which you will observe behind his left ear was won at the battle of Toulon. The pant which affects his wind is but the badge of honorable service in the campaign of Suabia, when no less a personage than Henri of Navarre asked 'Whose horse is that?' The Dauphin himself is more secure to-day for my beloved Gambetta's existence, and I should be but a churl were I to permit the smile of scorn to be pointed in his direction. My card, Henri! My card!"

With this I drew myself up proudly and felt for my card case.

It was gone. I had been robbed — but I had taken my stand, and a Paté de Foie Gras is not lightly to be swerved from his purpose, especially in the presence of women. My eye lighted upon the check lying upon the table, and the solution of my difficulties was before me. Hastily scribbling my full name and title on the back of the slip I handed it to Henri.

"For the lady, Henri," I muttered. "And wait for an answer."

Henri immediately took the check on his silver tray and handed it to the beautiful unknown, who with a gesture of scorn wrote her initials upon it.

"Certainly," I heard her say. "Certainly, Henri, if the gentleman wishes it. Have it charged to my account."

Digitized by Google

"For the lady, Henri."

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

"*Sapristi!*" I cried in my wrath at this additional insult. "Shall I, Robert Gaston de Launay Alphonse, Count de Foie Gras, and heir presumptive to the Marquisate of Huevos Pasada par Agua and the Estates of Pollio Grille of Spain, be thus affronted by a mere chit of a woman, who first laughs at my horse and then presumes to pay my score for breakfast? *Jamais!* Never. *Non-non. C'est impossible.*"

With this I turned my eyes full upon the arrogant beauty and addressed her as follows:

"Madame, you are a woman — I am a man, therefore to cross swords with you is impossible. Nevertheless you have seen fit to flout my horse — my poor but honest steed Gambetta, who for forty years has served my father and myself, and for twenty years before that did yeoman's service at the plough of my grandfather, Gaston, Comte de Ris de Veau, Duc de Nesselrode, and Grand Seigneur of the province of Petit Pois. Not content with this, Madame, you have treated contemptuously me, the Count of Paté de Foie Gras, who have measured foils with the proudest gentlemen of France, and have taken up the gauntlet in many a tourney in which the hands of fairer maids than thou were the prize of him who by his valiant lance should prove himself worthy of them. I am poor, but I am still a gentleman, and such insults may not go unavenged. I there-

Digitized by Google

fore ask you, Madame, for the name — the name and address — of some one, some man to whom I may go to seek redress. And have a care, Madame, that your choice be not lightly made, for I am an En Brochette whose sword is no plaything; but a blade so keen it pierces ere it strikes."

The proud beauty drew herself up haughtily.

"You have addressed these words to me, M'sieur?" she said.

"To you, Madame. Despite thy beauty, my rage knows no bounds, and if thy father, or thy brother, or thy fiancé, or thy attorney, be a gentleman, he will not deny me satisfaction."

At this point I drew myself erect into an attitude of hauteur which reminded me forcibly of the portraits of my ancestor Cela Va Sans Dire, the noble Touranian who fought so valiantly under Philip of Spain, whence came our title to the Huevos Pasada par Agua estates. A murmur of admiration burst instinctively from all parts of the breakfast room, and I could see too that the fair woman to whom my words were addressed was stirred to the depths of her being, for her cheeks mantled with the rich crimson of her patrician blood, and the bursting of a button from the wrist-band of her dainty glove showed that her pulses were beating madly.

"It is true that I am a woman," she replied,

Digitized by Google

"I landed in much disorder in the middle of the street."

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

dreamily. "Monsieur, I have scoffed at your horse, and viséd your breakfast bill, and I presume I owe you satisfaction. I have no father who is an adept at the foils. My brother is bottled up at Tokio with Richard Coeur de Davis and other Crusaders. I may not give you the name of my fiancé for I fear you would kill him, which, it being the dearest wish of my heart that some one should spit him well ere our wedding day on Tuesday next, would be the equivalent of murder. I can think of but one sword in France, then, that is worthy to champion my cause. The name of its wielder is there!"

With that she rose from her table and, throwing a card at my feet, swept majestically from the room. As she disappeared through the doorway I leaned over to pick up the fallen card, for, by my faith, so beautiful she was I could not take my eyes from off her sweet self before that. One glance at the name sent me staggering to the wall.

It was my own!

"Check, sir," said Henri, as I started for the door.

"Can't you see, fool, it is initialed?" I retorted, thrusting the fellow aside. "Charge it, as you have already been commanded."

With these words I rushed to the curb and leaped blindly for the saddle and Gambetta's

Digitized by Google

back, but the horse had been taken away and I landed in much disorder in the middle of the street.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER II.

In Which There is Something Doing.

HE READER of these imperishable memoirs will recall that Chapter One left me lying on my back in the streets of Paris, a fraction of a kilometre from the doors of the Café D'Oeuf. For a moment, M'sieurs, I was stunned by the fall, but youth crushed to earth shall rise again, and presently I was on my feet taking account of stock. Alas, the inventory was but a light one. I, Robert Gaston de Launay, Count of Paté de Foie Gras and Marquis Presumptive of the Estates of Pollio Grille in Spain, was bereft of my card case and my beloved horse Gambetta; yet did I still have my health and my long sword and my family name that was longer still. Priceless possessions, with which I might conquer the world!

The loss of Gambetta (who, I afterward ascertained, had been corralled by *La Societé Prévenir Cruauté d'Animals*) was swiftly repaired. A handsome red mare stood tethered before the café. I scribbled my I. O. U. for the price of the beast, which I estimated at thirty francs,

Digitized by Google

nailed the scrap of paper with my dagger to the café door, flung myself into the stirrups and galloped away, my bridle hand resting lightly on the pommel of my saddle.

Parbleu! you exclaim. Why this detail? M'sieurs, I am particular to mention the disposition of my bridle hand, for had it not rested as I have described for you, the map of Europe would not be colored as it is to-day, nor would I, Robert Gaston de Launay Alphonse, etc., have — But *ma foi!* I am anticipating the last chapter. This, then, M'sieurs, is what befell: As I clattered down the long hill beyond Lyonnaise, ten leagues from Paris, my bridle hand in some manner pressed a spring in the saddle's pommel, and this, opening, disclosed a secret recess in which reposed a letter and a handful of bank-notes. One glance at the inscription and all my wild Brochette blood surged madly to my brain; for the name was none other than that of the powerful Duke des Pommes de Terre au Gratin!

"*Diable!*" I murmured. "A conspiracy against the King! Count Paté de Foie Gras, your fortune is already made!"

A thud of hoofs behind me caused me to glance back, and I discerned a horseman dashing down the hill in a great cloud of dust. Drawing rein I awaited his approach with my customary *sang froid*, and presently found my-

Digitized by Google

"My horse!" he cried.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

self confronting a much agitated young man in blue velvet.

"My horse!" he cried, leveling a passionate finger at the red mare. "Rascal! My horse!"

"Not another franc," I returned firmly. For answer he flung my I. O. U. in my face. "S' death!" I roared, my temper giving away. "The paper of a Foie Gras has never before gone to protest. Draw, shrimp!"

I leaped lightly to the ground, threw off my cloak and hat and unfastened my *pourpoint*, the young man in blue velvet following suit.

"M'sieur," I remarked, as I tested the edge of my blade on my thumb-nail, "I fancy a more secluded spot for this encounter, preferably one sheltered from the cold north wind by a high wall and screened from the vulgar observation of the passers-by. However, I observe you are in haste, and myself am in some hurry to be gone, and so — have at you!"

The blades kissed sibilantly, and — poof! it was really nothing at all. Three passes and I had him spitted, and he expired almost instantly. Poor fool! to measure his feeble steel against the best swordsman in all France. I tossed the body into the bushes and went on my way.

I had killed the messenger to the Duke des Pommes de Terre au Gratin, and I, Count Paté de Foie Gras, was become the messenger. My

Digitized by Google

course was plain. I should deliver the letter to the Duke, and thus become a part of the conspiracy. All else was as heaven willed.

But what of the beautiful blonde unknown who had viséd my breakfast bill at the Café D'Oeuf? In my haste to leave Paris I had for the nonce forgotten her, and now the memory of her exquisite face swept over me a tidal wave of passion. A few hours ago I was penniless; now I tapped the banknotes in my pocket — I was ready money. Until I had repaid my divinity her trifling loan of two hundred and fifty-seven francs thirty centimes, not forgetting the *quartier* for Henri the affable *valet de place*, I could not, as a gentleman and a Brochette, declare my passion, a passion that flamed and crackled with every recollection of the details of her incomparable loveliness. For you must know, M'sieurs, that we of Brochette are as very tinder to the smiles of a beautiful woman. For two sous I would have abandoned the adventure into which fate had thrown me and returned to Paris; but one thing decided me to go on — I was enormously hungry, and the lights of Croquante were even now shooting out of the eastern dusk.

I flung into the Pousse Café, on the far edge of the village, with so much arrogance that the entire machinery of the place was instantly

Digitized by Google

"I flung into the Pousse Café."

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

at my command. I was, as I have said, enormously hungry, and I had cached six capons, a shoulder of mutton and ten bottles of wine before I lifted my head from my work, attracted by the bustle of a fresh arrival in the street before the café. A coupé was drawn up at the curb, and from it alighted — *mon Dieu!* scarcely could I credit my eyes — the haughty blonde of the Café D'Oeuf! She was followed by a man of distinguished bearing and exceedingly sour visage, who had a pretty trick of gnawing his under lip with his gleaming white teeth. I rose as the party entered the café, and with a sweeping bow, "Madame," I said, "it was your treat this morning. Permit me to set 'em back."

The lady drew herself up haughtily, then suddenly yielded to a tinkling merriment, while her companion rapped out an oath, scowling horribly meanwhile.

"*Ventre chat noir!*" said he. "Who is your foolish friend?"

Before the lady could reply I flung the name full in his face:

"R-r-robert Gaston de Launay Alphonse, Count Paté de Foie Gras, and Marquis —— Shall I continue, M'sieur?"

"No — *ventre chat noir!* — no," he bellowed, fishing out his card case. "*Ma foi*, M'sieur, your name is as long as your nose."

Digitized by Google

As he spoke he handed me his card, and with difficulty I repressed a start as I read:

"*Gaspard Henri Pierre, Duke des Pommes de Terre au Gratin. Thursdays from 2 p. m. to quarter past four.*"

"M'sieur is pleased to allude to my nose," I said, twisting the bit of pasteboard between my fingers. "M'sieur will find my sword even longer."

"*Parbleu!* as you will," replied the Duke indifferently, putting on his hat.

"Oh *merci!*" sighed the lady with a pretty moue. "Cannot we dine first? I am frightfully *affamé*."

"Business before pleasure, *chère* Isabelle," replied the Duke grumbling. "Come, M'sieur!"

As I bowed and prepared to follow, a light hand on my arm detained me, and I looked into the heavenly blue orbs of Isabelle.

"Beware the Duke, my brave Brochette," she whispered swiftly. "He is *un craqueur-jacque*."

I pressed her hand and with a heart beating in wild joy followed my adversary from the café.

The secluded spot chosen for the meeting was precisely to my fancy. A high wall sheltered us from the cold north wind, and the ground was firm and smooth. Every facility

Digitized by Google

"With an oath the Duke leaped back and blew a silver whistle."

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

for a first-class encounter was present. The Duke's countenance expressed the utmost indifference, whilst my own agitation proceeded wholly from the thrilling handclasp of the beauteous Isabelle.

"*À la carte*, I suppose," I remarked carelessly. The Duke bowed, with a bored expression, and the supple rapiers joined.

The Duke ventured a small order *à la carte*, but so swiftly did I fill it that he was compelled to throw himself back to avoid the lightning play of my point. The bored expression vanished from his face, for at once he discerned that he was up against it, as we of Brochette have the saying. He next essayed a thrust in tierce, and as I met this as promptly I heard him mutter between his set teeth: "Tierce, idle tierce!"

As for myself I was never more at mine ease. I was gay even, and hummed a Provençal ballad as I felt with my point for various parts of my adversary's anatomy. Seeing that I was his master at fence he played his last card, the secret thrust of Girolamo of Naples. I laughed as I parried it, for was it not I that had taught Girolamo the stroke? With an oath the Duke leaped back and blew thrice upon a silver whistle.

"Traitor!" I cried, but got no farther.

Digitized by Google

There was a rush of feet behind me, a heavy blow descended on my head, and the subsequent proceedings interested me no more.

When I was again able to sit up and take notice, I found myself in Cimmerian darkness, the lower half of my body lying in water. Dazed though I was, I was able to reflect that had the position of my body been reversed my condition would have been even less satisfactory. I put out a hand and touched a wall of stone, overgrown with moss.

"*Ma foi!*" I murmured, sizing up the unpleasant situation, "*ma foi!*" they have thrown me into a well!"

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER III.

In Which I Get Out of a Well and Into a Select Chateau.

A FOI!" I murmured again, as the well-water drenched me to the bone; "but had I here His Grace, Gaspard Henri Pierre, Duke des Pommes de Terre, right cheerfully would I spit him thrice."

So hot for revenge, indeed, was I; so dastardly had been the trick which the Duke and his minions had served me, that, verily, had it not been for the well, then and there would I have gotten up and gone in frothing search of my assailant.

Still hot, I gathered my wits about me. Where was I? Down a well. What, then, to do, I soliloquized. Should I yell and rouse some slumbering lout? A de Foie Gras yell? *Diable!* Absurd! Then, of a sudden, it occurred to me, and I laughed — the debonair, care-free laugh of the Café D'Œuf. It being a well, someone in good season would come to it and lower the bucket. *Le sublime et le beau!* Composing myself, I dozed.

Digitized by Google

How long I slept, I know not. But it was dawn of day when the bucket with a vicious swoop descended and struck me fairly on the head. With an oath, I awoke. 'T was a beardless youth who had lowered it and thrusting his face beyond the well curb's edge, he ejaculated:

"Say!"

A strange way, M'sieurs, to address a de Foie Gras, but I swallowed the affront and cried in answer:

"What?"

"I bring a message for Robert Gaston de Launay Alphonse, Count de Foie Gras. Is M'sieur it?"

The dialect of the youth was strange and new to me and yet mine own name and title right readily did I recognize.

"Pull up, boy," I commanded, my being thrilled with wonder at what the message might be. "Haul up on yonder diablish rope and haul carefully or, body of Saint Louis, your skull shall pay for it."

"*Le message est collect*, M'sieur," grinned the youth above me. "Put three francs fifty centimes in the bucket first or I 'll throw the message down. *Voyez!*"

Sapristi! For half a sou I would have cracked his surly crown; but what was I to do, being in the well? Cursing roundly, I threw a

Digitized by Google

"I saw with a thrill a perfumed note,"

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

bedraggled bank note in the bucket and watched him pull it up.

"M'sieur le Count is *un marque facile*," he gleefully chirped, on seizing the note. "And now, M'sieur, for the rescue."

Down came the bucket again, and this time the rascal wound lustily at the rope till I neared the curb. Then, fearing my avenging hand, as — *Ma foi!* — he had cause to — he darted off hot foot, leaving his chapeau behind him on the dewy grass.

I looked at it and read across the band: "Croquante District Telegraphe 79," but I gave it but an instant's attention, for close to the well-curb, stuck upright in the soft, moist earth, was as brave a rapier as gallant would wish to handle, and tied to its diamond-studded hilt, I saw with a thrill a perfumed note.

"From Isabelle!" rapturously I cried, seizing the note and kissing it a thousand times. What cared I for the night in the well? What, for the varlet of a boy? What, for my dripping raiment? Naught, thrice naught! Isabelle, the beauteous, the adorable, the incomparable, had given me her love.

I opened the note and hurriedly scanned it. *Parbleu!* It was unsigned and unfinished, but there was no mistaking the hand, the delicately feminine hand.

Digitized by Google

"From Isabelle!" I cried again, and with beating heart read as follows:

"My Brave Brochette: —

I followed you from the Inn last night and saw and heard all. I saw the Duke's hirelings throw you, swooning, into the well. I saw them contemptuously snap your sword — the best blade in the whole of France — and my blood boiled —"

"Ah, *chère* Isabelle," I cried, "Sweetheart! Even as mine did in the darksome well."

Then I read on:

"Be not so credulous, my own, as to think that the Duke believes you dead. The well, he knew, would revive, not kill you. But beware, for now your life is indeed in peril. The body in the bushes has been found. The horse on which you rode to Croquante has been recognized and seized —"

"Fool that I was," I hissed, "to have replaced the Duke's letter in the saddle's pommel."

The letter went on:

"And you are a marked man. I send you secretly by trusty messenger a rapier; — 't is the Duke's. Use it, my brave Brochette, but be prudent. Be wary and, Oh, be watchful for my sake. While, if worse comes to worst, as perchance it may right speedily, repeat boldly, no matter to whom, the words; *Deux cafés cognacs, garçon.* 'T is the secret —."

There ended the note abruptly. Again I pressed it to my lips and then consigned it to my wallet. Dear as it was to me, there were other things to think of now. Watchfully — for who could tell at what moment I would be set

Digitized by Google

"It was the work of a moment only to knock the stable boy on the head."

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

upon? — I made my way back toward the Inn, rapier in hand.

"*Deux cafés cognacs, garçon,*" I memorized softly; "*Deux cafés cognacs, garçon.*"

It was barely sunrise, a silent time and sweet; a time most fitting for deep reflections, and mine — *Ma foi!* — were deep enough.

So the young fool's body had been found. Well, even so, what of it? Bodies had been found before, and in bushes. My horse, Gambetta's successor, had been recognized and seized. Again, what of it? They would press the pommel; the letter to the Duke would be found. Aye, what then? Seeking the well, they would find in it only water, and then —

"Ah, *chère* Isabelle! Sweetheart!" I thought, bending my rapier reflectively, "thy words of caution were timely, truly, and I thank thee from my soul."

Being steedless again, my first thought was to secure a horse. *Bien!* Nothing easier. There were several of them in the Inn yard and it was the work of a moment only to knock the stable boy on the head and untether the best horse there.

My next duty, naturally, was to get out of the town, and this I did at a canter. Only when out on the highroad, a good mile from Croquante, did I pause and look back. The

Digitized by Google

sun was gilding the spires and chimney pots; the birds were twittering in the poplars by the roadside; not a soul was in sight 'twixt the town and myself. Once more turning straight in the saddle, and with not a little satisfaction, I was amazed beyond measure to see a stranger, silent and motionless, waiting my pleasure beside the horse's head. Imagine the start it gave me when I recognized in him an outrider of the coupé in which Isabelle and the Duke des Pommes de Terre had tooled the day before to the Inn.

"Well, sirrah!" I demanded.

"I would deliver a message to M'sieur le Count," he replied.

"*Ma foi!*" I cried, blithely; "it is a day of messages. It is my second, in sooth, since sun-up. Speak freely, sirrah."

"Mademoiselle would see and hold converse with thee, M'sieur le Count," the man continued. "It is most urgent. There is no time to be lost. She is at the Chateau Demi Tasse at Poisson, a scant three miles from Banc d'Huitres on the road to Paris."

I looked the man steadily in the eye ere I spoke.

"You are not deceiving me, sirrah?" finally I said. "If you are —"

"No, M'sieur le Count, no," he replied earnestly.

Digitized by Google

"So be it!" I cried, my mind made up. "I will seek Mademoiselle at the Chateau Demi Tasse, but if she be not there, verily, at our next meeting, I shall draw and quarter thee!"

"M'sieur le Count has spoken," the man said, gravely; and touching spurs to my horse, I left him standing in the high road.

Scenting treachery, but willing to go through Hades itself for a glimpse of her who was more precious than life, I took the Paris road, headed for Poisson and the Chateau Demi Tasse. Unaccosted on the way, I reached the village at noon-day and straightway located the chateau on the Rue de la Upper Main.

The place had a sinister aspect, dark, dank and forbidding. Around the corner of the house, as I entered the drive-way and tied my horse, came a tradesman's boy with a box on his shoulder and whistling cheerily a popular *Deux Temps*.

"Who resides here, boy?" I inquired.

"Lots," he replied. "'T is Madame Filet's Select Boarding Chateau."

With renewed presentiment of evil, I rapped on the front door and was shown by a servant into a room adjoining the main hall.

"M'sieur wishes to engage lodgings?" she interrogated. "I will go and call Madame Filet."

Before I could detain her she left the room, and the next instant there arose from the apart-

Digitized by Google

ment across the hall a shriek that I shall hear to my dying day. It was the voice of Isabelle, and —

"They are choking me!" she cried.

Rapier in hand, I dashed madly to the room whence the screams had come, and bursting open the door, I beheld not Isabelle, but the Duke des Pommes de Terre. My sword was knocked from my hand by some one behind me; the door was slammed and bolted, and I was alone with an ugly, glowering foe.

"*Diable!* The Duke!" I exclaimed.

"Aye! *Diable!* The Duke!" he repeated harshly after me. "We meet again, you see, M'sieur le Popinjay."

My blood boiled again at the insult, but what could I do? I was bladeless. I had only my health and my family name. Then, of a sudden, I recalled the mysterious words of Isabelle.

"*Deux cafés cognacs, garçon! Deux cafés cognacs,*" I cried.

Mon Dieu! Shall I ever forget, M'sieurs, the change that came over the Duke!

Digitized by Google

*"**Monsieur wishes** to engage lodgings?" she interrogated.*

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER IV.

In Which I Make a Startling Discovery.

THE RICH mahogany hue of that dissipated face turned an ashen gray as I gave voice to the phrase and the Duke, staggering backward in a sudden surge of dismay, dropped sword upon the tesselated floor. To leap madly forward and seize it by the hilt was but the work of a moment; and again, as I found myself armed once more, I hissed in the man's gaping countenance the cry:

"*Deux cafés cognacs, garçon!*"

"*Mon Dieu!*" he muttered, a white froth upon his lips, and his eyes rolling madly, as he started aback. "The word!"

And then it all came over me like a flash. The man's secret in that involuntary movement backward was revealed, and the manifest wince that crept over his being as the word *garçon* fell from my lips showed him in his true colors.

The person who stood before me was *not* the true Duke des Pommes de Terre, but some base born churl masquerading in borrowed — nay, better put it stolen — plumes. I eyed him narrowly as he mopped his brow with his hand-

Digitized by Google

kerchief, which in very truth bore the ducal crest, although he handled it like a serviette.

"You heard?" I cried. "*Deux cafés cognacs, garçon!*"

"*Oui*, M'sieur," he answered, cringing low and washing his hands in *savon invisible*. "Instantly, M'sieur," he added, placing the handkerchief over his wrist as though it were a napkin and he merely the serving man of a Boulevard *salle à manger*.

"Pah!" I ejaculated as my scorn swept over me; and then for the first time came relief to the over-tense situation for, ludicrously enough, even as I blew the scornful exclamation from my lips, this spurious Duke sat plump upon the floor in the manner of an object that had been blown over by some sudden, paralyzing gust of wind. "Marionette!" I added. "Th-huh!"

"*Non*, Monsieur; *non*. Jules Fagot, Monsieur," he chattered. "Plain Jules Fagot at your service, Monsieur."

"Ah — Jules Fagot, eh? Of where — Fontainbleu, or what other famous wood-pile?" I demanded.

"Le Café de la Paix, M'sieur, of Paris," was his quivering response.

"Head-waiter or chef?" I persisted, resolved to press my questions home until the man's very soul lay naked before me.

Digitized by Google

"Non, Monsieur; *valet de cuisine*, M'sieur, *seulement valet de cuisine*," he mumbled.

"And his Grace the true Duke des Pommes de Terre? What has become of him?" I cried.

A greater fear racked the form of the cringing coward before me, and he made as though he could not speak. The point of the rapier restored him to utterance, however, for I made no hesitation of puncturing his silken hosiery with it until the sawdust fairly spouted from the wound.

"He is a prisoner," replied Fagot, under the pressure of pain, "in the wine cellar at the Café de la Paix. He would not enter into the conspiracy and it was necessary that he should, else all of us would be hanged before sundown. They seized upon me, the living image of the Duke save as to the mole upon the chin, to assume his personality, at least until the hour was ripe for placing him upon the throne of his uncle."

"And had he not consented then?" I cried.

"Then I was to reign in his stead," Fagot replied.

"A most foul conspiracy!" I muttered. "To place a base born churl upon the throne of Charlemagne. *Ventre Saltpetre*, but it is incredible. I do not know whether to believe this varlet's tale or not. Jules Fagot, it is true that you greatly resemble the Duke, but, aha! mayhap

Digitized by Google

indeed thou art he and lying to me, still" — I added, bending over him threateningly, for as I spoke I perceived the mole upon the chattering coward's chin. "Thou hast the birth-mark!"

"*Oui*, M'sieur," he replied, his pallor deepening as one having been caught with stolen goods, "but it is spurious." And with this he flicked the mole from off his chin with his thumb-nail and handed it to me. My first impulse was to toss the thing out of the window in sheer disgust, but second thought made me keep it, since there was no telling how far such material evidence of their dastardly plottings would go to bring mellow fruit to the spreading branches of the gallows-tree. So, having no other where to put it I affixed it firmly to my own chin, little recking what tremendous influence this simplest of acts was to have upon the history of France and myself during the next forty-eight hours.

"A damnable conspiracy this of yours, my Fagot," said I.

"France has been ruled by its cavaliers long enough," he growled. "It is time the makers of the true France came into their own."

"The Makers of true France, varlet?" I cried. "*Sapristi de Santa Maria* — and who may they be?"

"The Chefs, M'sieur," he replied. "The Chefs of Marseilles, of Toulon, aye, and of *la*

Digitized by Google

"The sawdust fairly spouted from the wound."

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Belle Paris. It is we who have won glorious renown for our beautiful country, yet where is our recognition. Our generals who in time of war have won great victories have risen to places of honor and power. Field Marshall Vicomte de Tureen has been ennobled for a single moment's brave display of reckless courage on the plains of old Compiegne. M. le Baron Bar-le-Duc for his tragedy at Fontenoy was taken into the Council of the King and dowered with vast possessions. M. le General de Roquefort has received the richest rewards the country lavishes upon the fortunate ones of war; but we, sir, we the Chefs who in times of peace and war have shed lustre upon the tables of our King — we still go unrewarded. 'T is well to lift on high the arms of France, but he contributes most to a nation's lasting greatness who keeps its stomach fair and fed, its palate sated, and its dreams of glory safe and sane and sweet."

Faith, but the fellow's words went deep into my soul and stirred it well, and had he been less cringing and kept his hands apart instead of giving them that low born wring and twist that marks the menial as a servitor for aye, right gladly would I have offered him the softened glance of sympathy. But there he was intrinsically the valet of the kitchen, and I, of course, a Huevos Pasada par Agua, to say nothing of

Digitized by Google

my claim to the blood of a d'en Brochette, could not well descend unto the level of such canaille. Moreover, it infuriated me beyond the power of epithet to think that such a one had crossed swords with me — the wielder of one of the proudest blades of France.

"Go on, fellow," I commanded, suppressing the momentary impulses of sympathy.

"We have united and form a party 2,000,000 strong of active workers, each one of whom can count upon a hundred sympathizing friends — or 2,000,000 subjects —"

"*Ventre Saint Ambergris!*" I cried, pacing the floor in agitation at the stupendous revelation I had stumbled upon. "A hundred times the population of our land."

"In truth, yes," he replied, quietly. "And that, Milord, without a vestige of a surface agitation. You may well pause in the face of such figures, for if they mount so high in secret effort, to what will they amount when a public propaganda brings the rest flocking to our standards!"

What my answer would have been I hardly know, for we were interrupted by three soft knocks upon the door. Fagot, his cringing instantly faded into resolution, sprang to his feet and reached for the knob.

"If you call for help you are a dead man!" I whispered, blocking his path and holding my

Digitized by Google

sword point directly at his throat. "Send them away."

"Who 's there!" he called, hoarsely.

"It is I, Monsieur le Duke — Le Chevalier de Brie, Captain of the Camembert Carabiniers."

My heart fluttered with excitement, for the name of that bravo was already a terror to half of France.

"Tell him you are engaged or you die!" I whispered, emphasizing my command by pricking the varlet's Adam's apple, with the tip end of his own sword. "Quick!" I added, as he hesitated.

"Later, Chevalier, later," the spurious Duke called aloud. "I am on the point — ouch! — I am on the point of settling a delicate matter, *mon Capitaine.* I will give thee audience later."

Ma foi, but I was relieved to hear the clanking spurs of the receding footsteps without. Not, let me tell you, that in single combat I feared de Brie, nor that I held unwelcome the prospect of crossing blades with him some day. In sooth, the contrary was more to my real taste, for had I not made a vow to a fair lady of Castile — the lovely Catherine de Savon, my cousin — that for her wedding gift, the curled chin whisker of de Brie woven into a chatelaine, would go to her once the nuptial hour was set? But at the moment, I had other things to think on. The rascal, Fagot, and

Digitized by Google

his base conspiracy were fitter things for Huevos Pasada par Agua at the pressing hour, and so I say, I was much relieved to hear the clanking spurs of the receding footsteps without.

"Now, you miserable atom of the proletariat," I observed, turning to the cringing Fagot, "continue with your tale of infamy. In what way is the fair Isabelle mixed up in this intrigue?"

"My fiancée," he answered, his sickly, green face lighting up with passion, his head maddeningly chirked as though he were, indeed, a devil among the ladies.

"Yours?" I cried, my wrath surpassing bounds.

"Well — his — the real Duke des Pommes de Terre, but mine by right of succession," he answered, setting his arms akimbo and twirling his moustachios in a surge of conceit.

To grab him by the throat and toss him violently across the room into a corner as if he were so much mere bagging was the work of an instant and, *Ventre Saint Petersburg*, his last hour were indeed come, had not a piercing shriek from behind the wainscot distracted my attention.

"To me — Huevos — to me!" came a despairing woman's voice. "*Mon Dieu* — to me or I die."

It was again the voice of Isabelle.

Digitized by Google

I leaped to the wainscot and madly felt along its panelled sides for some possible hidden spring that should open a secret door leading to the distressed lady's quarters. Inch by inch, I covered the whole side of that accurst wall with thumb and finger, until — click! The center panel slid to one side, and a black corridor without disclosed itself. Plunging through the opening, I started to run. Fagot, as I did so, rose hastily and slid back the panel, leaving me without and in utter darkness.

"*A moi*, Huevos, *a moi!*" came Isabelle's voice from the fore, and I began to run towards it. A mocking laugh from behind the panel grated harshly upon my ears.

"Run, you squirrel, run!" called Fagot. "The maid to the fore; the oubliette behind! Ha-ha — Ha-ha!"

And then, as I sped along, I realized the horrid truth.

The floor of that cursed corridor was naught else than an easy running treadmill, and run till I lost my wind, scamper as I might, I could not get a single step forward, and what was more devilish still, I could not stop for rest.

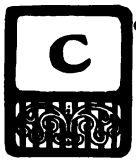
For behind me lay the oubliette.

Squirrel indeed! That was I. A winded one at that.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER V.

In Which the Hero Acquires a Title.



ONSIDER, M'SIEURS, the emotions of a man, however stout of heart, condemned to run forever in a Stygian blackness, with the appalling alternative of pitching backward into the slimy maw of an oubliette!

Was ever woman in this humor wooed? Was ever Paté de Foie Gras in this manner served?

As with desperate feet I whirled the accurst treadmill, my hands pressed flat against the corridor end, I hastily reviewed the later phases of the adventure into which fate and a susceptible heart had hurled me. The Duke des Pommes de Terre au Gratin was a prisoner in the cobwebbed cellars of the Café de la Paix in Paris, and his beautiful fiancée, Isabelle, was in the power of the pseudo Duke, the base-born Jules Fagot. For Fagot and his wretched conspiracy I cared not a sou, but my blood seethed as I reflected that Isabelle was ignorant of Fagot's real character. Unhappy girl, she had, like so many of her sex, been betrothed without having seen the face of her fiancé. The reflec-

Digitized by Google

tion was at once a pleasure and a pain. She had not seen the real Duke; why, then, should she love him? And in a battle for a woman's heart, all a Brochette has ever asked is a fair field and no favor. All this, M'sieurs, by the way of running comment.

I had run, I judged, some three hours ere my strength, enormous as it has always been, fled from me utterly. A shuddering dread of the oubliette had upborne me, but even that vanished at last against my deadly exhaustion. I tottered, like some mouldering old castle riven by a lightning bolt. I sank upon one knee, my brain reeling. I breathed the name of Isabelle, and fell forward upon my face. The oubliette had claimed its victim!

Strange, I reflected a few moments later, I have had no sensation of falling into a pit. *Mon Dieu!* A maddening suspicion coursed like quicksilver through my whirling brain. I struggled to my feet, struck a match, and by the flaring of its small light I saw that my suspicion was very truth. *There was no treadmill! There was no oubliette!* I had been victim of a fiendish suggestion assisted by my own heated fancy. For three hours I had turned an imaginary treadmill at the blind end of a dark corridor, and all the while stood a door at my elbow, ready to be passed.

Digitized by Google

In a towering rage I dashed open the door and found myself in an unoccupied chamber giving on the street. A lace handkerchief lay crumpled on the floor. I picked it up, and a wave of passion swept over me. I recognized the perfume. It was Isabelle's. I flung out of the chamber and clattered down the stairs. Too late! Too late! The vulture and the dove had flown!

For a space of five minutes or more the denizens of the Chateau Demi Tasse had opportunity to judge the quality of a Brochette balked of his prey. The original bull in the china shop was not more destructive, nor had he half so terrible a bellow.

"*Sacre nom de chat noir!*" I raged, hurling a water bottle through the best window; and "*Ventre de violon!*" crushing with a chair a thousand francs of Sevres china and cut glass. The servants cowered in affright, the lady cashier fled, Mme. Filet ran for the gendarmerie. I strode to the stables. The *garçon d'ecurie* took to his heels, and undisturbed I saddled the best horse in sight. As I jingled into the street Mme. Filet returned with a score of gendarmes, but I rode the *canaille* down and set my face toward Paris.

I had galloped a league or more before my wild Brochette blood resumed its normal

Digitized by Google

"I rode the canaille down."

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

flow. Then suddenly I made a discovery that banished for the nonce all memory of my late disaster. The saddle I sat in was the saddle of the dead messenger to the Duke des Pommes de Terre! With trembling fingers I pressed the pommel. The letter lay again before my eyes — intact, the seal unbroken.

"A Brochette! A Brochette!" I cried exultingly. The road to fortune was again open.

But first I must have fresh apparel and a rapier. These I should purchase at Manchet, toward which I spurred my horse. I thrust the precious letter in my pocket and stroked my chin reflectively. As I did so my fingers encountered the property mole which, a few hours before, I had flicked from the chin of the impudent impostor, Jules Fagot, and thoughtlessly affixed to my own countenance.

"So," I mused, tapping the mole, "with this pitiful bit of make-up the wretched Fagot hoped to cozen the world. Ass! Why, one would say that I, Count Paté de Foie Gras, was become the Duke. And, *ma foi!* with more of reason, for my blood is as good as his, and were I suitably apparelled" — I glanced at my disordered raiment — "I should look the Duke in very sooth."

Humoring thus my whimsey I rode into Manchet and sought a department store, where

Digitized by Google

I purchased a princely suit of clothes of impeccable cut and quality, and a rapier of best Toledo.

"*C'est le Duc*," I overheard a *demoiselle de boutique* remark to her neighbor, and the whisper ran from counter to counter: "*C'est le Duc. C'est le Duc.*"

I felt my chin. The mole was still there. In a flash the cringing servility of the proprietor was explained. Bent double, he accompanied me to my horse. "Your Excellency is well?" he said obsequiously. "Shall I not send your Excellency's purchases to the chateau?"

"A word in your ear, *canaille*," I answered, scowling at him. "I am not what I seem to be."

"Instantly I perceived that by your Excellency's disguise," he answered, with a glance at my travel-stained and adventure-rent wardrobe. "Your Excellency may command my discretion."

"Very good," said I. "Now tell me, has aught occurred at the chateau?"

"Nothing, Excellency. The chateau is deserted, save for the servants."

I mounted and tied my purchases to the saddle horn. "One final question, *canaille:* where is the chateau?"

The man stared open-mouthed. Then a

Digitized by Google

smile cleft his countenance. "Your Excellency is pleased to jest," he said.

"Answer me!" I thundered. Startled, he pointed up the road.

"Half a league, Excellency."

"Now — silence!" I said, piercing him with a glance.

"Your Excellency may command my discretion," he mumbled, as I pricked up my horse and galloped away.

So; my resemblance to the Duke was more than casual. You will scarcely credit it, M'sieurs, but I had forgotten my own features. I was no self-worshipping Narcissus. 'T was years since I had looked into other mirror than that of woman's eyes. Impelled by curiosity I sprang from my horse and gazed into the glassy depths of a wayside pool. I saw — a man of five and twenty, remarkably handsome and *distingué*, with a very white skin and intensely black hair and eyes. "*Ma foi*!" I murmured, "I did not know I was so well favored."

Parbleu! An inspiration! I led my horse into a thicket and attired myself in my new raiment. "Farewell, Count Paté de Foie Gras!" I cried, as I tossed away my shabby garments. "Henceforth you are the Duke des Pommes de Terre!"

Thus bravely accoutred and feeling every

Digitized by Google

inch a Duke, I rode boldly into the chateau courtyard, dismounted, and flung the reins to a waiting man-at-arms.

The chateau wore a deserted look, but it had a grand and lordly air, and appeared in excellent repair. A minion in livery, whom I took to be the Duke's valet, preceded me up a magnificent staircase and into a suite of rooms furnished with the utmost luxury and elegance. The second of these was a large and admirably proportioned apartment; a log fire roared up the enormous chimney, and in a curtained alcove I observed a sumptuous and luxurious bed. Over the high, richly ornamented chimney-piece hung a portrait of a gentleman. The face seemed strangely familiar to me, yet I could not remember where I had seen it before. Suddenly, "*Ma foi!*" I burst out, smiting my hip, "*it is myself!*" That is to say, M'sieurs, it was the Duke des Pommes de Terre, but the resemblance was perfect. There was but one flaw: I had affixed the mole to the wrong side of my chin. This error I had no sooner corrected than my ear was assailed by a bustle in the courtyard. I stepped to the balcony, and —

Sapristi! Whom should I behold but the arch-plotter Jules Fagot, the beauteous Isabelle, and that most truculent of bravos, the Chevalier de Brie, Captain of the Camembert Carabiniers!

Digitized by Google

"'T was the face of Fagot that riveted my attention"

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Upon the bravo I. bestowed but a glance; upon the glorious face of Isabelle my gaze rested but for an instant. 'T was the face of Fagot that riveted my attention. *Ma foi!* would you believe it, M'sieurs? — myself had not noted it before — *the fellow looked as like me as two centimes!* Upon his chin he had glued another mole, to replace the one I had taken from him!

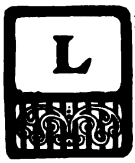
Instantly my quick mind took in the situation with one sweeping cerebration. It was to be a battle of wits between the rival Dukes. "Ha!" I muttered exultingly, as my eagle eye pounced upon the chin of my antagonist, "I have the fellow on the hip! Fool! He has overreached himself!"

FAGOT HAD MISPLACED THE MOLE!

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER VI.

In Which There are Dukes and Dukes.



IFE ! Life ! Ah, what is life, M'sieurs, beyond the sunny borders of beloved France? Where else does the blood so swiftly course? Where else has the day, from sun to sun, such a pageant of events? Where else — but *Mon Dieu!* Why wander thus? The facts for themselves shall ably testify.

Marvel, M'sieurs; 't was scant two days since, seated souless in the large bow window on the Rue de June Fourteenth side of the Café D'Oeuf, I had first held converse with Isabelle, the incomparable, yet within that brief time, I had journeyed from Paris to Croquante, from Croquante to Poisson and the house of Demi Tasse and from Poisson to Manchet, where with Mole secure and eye commanding, I was now impersonating the Duke des Pommes de Terre in the Duke's own chateau and expecting momentarily the coming of Fagot, the despicable ! Ah, France ! France ! Where else but in thy fragrant realm? Where else but 'neath thy glowing skies?

I meditate now, M'sieurs, and I dream be-

Digitized by Google

sides. But when I stepped back from the balcony after seeing Isabelle, Fagot and the Chevalier de Brie in the castle yard below, believe me, I neither dreamed nor meditated. The first thrill of triumphant exultation, which I felt on perceiving from the window that the base-born Fagot had misplaced the mole, gave way instanter to a sober reflection that the game was not yet won; nor, indeed, fairly begun, though speedily enough did I begin it.

A duller pate than mine, M'sieurs, — for dullness was ne'er a trait of any d'en Brochette — would easily have noted with whom the advantage lay. The churl Fagot was ignorant of my presence in the Duke's chateau and still more ignorant of the pleasing truth that for the time being, at least, the Duke was I, and I the Duke.

"*Ma foi!*" I muttered grimly, giving to my mole a final pat, "I shall not, methinks, be tardy in acquainting him."

Striding past the fire and the portrait of His Grace — here I laughed, as who could help? A warm blaze in the massive fire place; a sumptuous repast, I doubted not, whenever I chose to order it; servants galore at my beck and call, all these, in sooth, for Brochette, while the Duke — *Mon Dieu* — the Duke lay shivering and cursing in the dismal wine vaults of the Café de la Paix. M'sieurs, I shrugged my shoulders and strode on.

Digitized by Google

It was the way of the world, M'sieurs; of the world and France.

Reaching the door, I called lustily for a menial. Promptly, one responded, low bowing.

"Get you to the yard, fellow," I commanded, "and you will find there three travelers, newly arrived; a lady and two male companions" — the word gentlemen, M'sieurs, stuck in my throat — "Approach the stouter of the men — are you attending strictly, sirrah?"

"*Oui*, Your Grace."

"Approach the stouter of the men and repeat to him these words, no more, no less: '*Deux cafés cognacs, Garçon. Deux cafés cognacs.*' Now, be off."

For a second, the man stared wildly and hesitated.

"Go!" I repeated. "Do you understand?"

With quaking knees and shaking head, the fellow started down the mighty stair case.

"*Sapristi!*" I laughed, as I watched him turn the landing, "friend Fagot's face will be well worth scanning, I trow, if yonder menial proves not a dolt."

Still inwardly laughing, I listened, for the spirit of the jest was bubbling within me, and eagerly did I await the developments which I knew must soon come. 'T would be d'en Brochette who first would score in the tournament of wits.

Digitized by Google

Anxious to see as well as to hear, I descended softly to the landing below. Cautiously, but with a lively sense of anticipation, I directed my gaze upon the entrance hall. The trio were within the chateau. How Fagot, masquerading as the Duke, had passed unchallenged by the warder and the men-at-arms was at first a mystery profound to me. Then I recalled that the guard at the gate had been changed at sun-down and the thing in a twinkling was clear. The men who saluted Jules Fagot, bogus Duke des Pommes de Terre, were not the same set that an hour before had presented halberds on the coming of d'en Brochette — likewise bogus, but — Saints witness it — in a worthy cause. There were two Dukes in that house, M'sieurs, and I alone as yet was aware of it.

"Delicious!" exultantly I cried. "And now for Fagot's welcome. It shall be a royal one, believe me, M'sieur. *valet de cuisine.*"

Carefully, I peered beyond the stair rail. The shadows of nightfall were gathering apace and there was scant danger that I should be seen till I chose deliberately to disclose myself. Fagot — cringing scullion, how my hands ached to throttle him! — Fagot at that moment was divesting Isabelle of her cloak, and their forms were sharply silhouetted in the glow of the great hall fire. The Chevalier de Brie, Captain of the

Digitized by Google

Camembert Carabiniers, stood silent to one side, near the foot of the grand stair case and — *Diable!* To him came the menial whom I had entrusted with the words! Fagot's back was turned. He did not hear. This clown of a trencherman, this ass of the household, would deliver my address of welcome to the wrong man!

"*Sacre saucisson de Bologne!*" I hissed, grinding my teeth together like the upper and nether stones of a mill. "'T is now a game of chance, with skill at a discount."

"*D-deux c-cuk-cafés c-cognacs, Gar—M'sieur,*" stammered — nay, almost whimpered — my donkey of a messenger.

"What sayest thou, varlet?" the chevalier fiercely inquired.

"*D-d-d-deux c-cafés cug-cognacs, M'sieur?*"

"*Parbleu!*" cried the Chevalier. "A strange refreshment, truly, to offer a hungry man; but certainly, bring them, if it be the Duke's custom and the way of the chateau."

"*Oui,* M'sieur," chirped the doltish lackey, evidently much relieved, and starting rapidly for the family sideboard. The Chevalier, however, detained him.

"*Garçon,*" he said, "Hither!"

"*Oui, oui,* M'sieur," chirped the blithering fool once more. And then said the Chevalier:

"Make it three, *garçon.*"

Digitized by Google

"Fagot was at that moment divesting Isabelle of her cloak."

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

"*Sacre saucisson de Bologne!*" again I hissed, in the darkness of the stair. "He has taken their orders. Idiot that I was to expect aught else of a waiter."

But 't was bootless, M'sieurs, to waste time in regrets. The game for the instant had set against me. Stay set, it should not. The next run of cards should tell another tale.

I remained by the rail of the landing only long enough to see Fagot, Isabelle and the Chevalier De Brie, attended by obsequious retainers, start in the direction of the stair. The servants bore lights, and the nook in which I stood would soon become untenable. Swiftly and softly, for I was not yet ready to disclose my presence, preferring to wait instead till the time was fully ripe, I tip-toed to the large apartment, to which, in the guise of the Duke, I had at first repaired, and entering silently, barred the door. Safe did I feel in doing so, M'sieurs, for was not Fagot, like myself, wholly unfamiliar with the Chateau's interior, and as unlikely as would I have been to take chances with closed doors, when suspicion is so readily roused? I leaned forward, with an ear to the panel, and listened intently. *Sapristi!* I had recked aright. The trio had passed.

Whither, I cared not — at least for the moment. A plan of action was shaping in my

Digitized by Google

mind, but I myself — *Ma foi!* I was in no hurry. The dinner hour, I felt, would best serve my purpose, and in the meanwhile I determined, I must communicate with Isabelle. To arrange a meeting was by no means difficult. I had but to send for her, and she would come. Hence, I pulled the silken bell cord, unbarred the door and then resumed my seat by the mammoth fire place.

"Your Grace rang?" queried the valet who responded.

"Even so," I replied, on such good terms with myself that I relaxed my dignity a little. Then I resumed: "Seek you the lady who came here at sundown — er — Simon, and say that the Duke awaits her here in this room."

Then *this* man stared also. *Ma foi!* But they were a staring set in the Chateau Pommes de Terre.

"Well, sirrah?" I queried, sharply. "What now?"

"An' it please Your Grace," stammered the fellow, who was evidently a pampered family retainer. "But did I not just see Your Grace, with the lady Your Grace just named, in the blue saloon adjoining the great hall?"

"Zounds, vassal!" I thundered. "But this passeth patience! Suppose thou didst? Get thee to the lady with my message. Hold!" —

Digitized by Google

the fellow's chance warning had stood me in good stead — "Deliver it not, save she be alone."

The will of a Duke in his own chateau is akin to the law of the land. Obeyed it must be. Isabelle obeyed, and the same family retainer ushered her into my presence. Midway between the door and the firelight, she stopped apruptly, the scorn intended for Jules Fagot expressed in every line of her marvelous face. So; she had naught but contempt for him, duke or scullion, as who could doubt who knew her?

"You sent for me?" she asked icily, and then with magnificent irony, "Your Grace!"

I arose from my seat and she started slightly.

"Aye, Mademoiselle," was my measured reply. "I sent for you, 't is true. Your cries of the Chateau Demi Tasse are answered at last, Mademoiselle!"

"What mean you?" she gasped, and then, "Who are you? *Mon Dieu!* Not —"

"D'en Brochette," I whispered, tremulously. "Aye, d'en Brochette, Mademoiselle, risen from the well."

An instant more, and she was in my arms, an embrace of body and soul. Then into her eager ear, I poured the tale; the tale of Fagot and the tread-mill; of my visit to the department store and the discovery of my resemblance to the

Digitized by Google

Duke; of my coming to the Chateau and, last, of my bold, rash plan, in which she must help.

"*Banque* on me, my brave Brochette!" she cried, passionately. "Though no love have I for the Duke des Pommes de Terre, to whom unhappily I am betrothed, my heart bleeds when I think of the wrong these ruffians have done him. As for Jules Fagot—"

"As for Jules Fagot, Mademoiselle," said I. "Look you! There read his doom."

As I spoke, I pointed to the Portrait of a Gentleman and in a few more words, for time was precious now, I told her the story of the misplaced mole. Then, speaking quickly, I unfolded my plan.

"To-night," said I, "when you, Mademoiselle, dine in the Great Hall of the Chateau with Fagot and De Brie, take my appearance on the threshold as a signal. When there you see me, hesitate not, nor waver, but with steady, unerring fingers, reach for Fagot's face and wrench the mole from his chin. Do this, and fear not, for men-at-arms will be in the corridor, ready to rush in at my command and bear both Fagot and De Brie to the lowermost cell of the donjon."

Again came Isabelle's passionate assurance, but trebly intensified: "*Banque* on me, my brave Brochette. *Banque* on me!"

Ma foi! Can you not for yourselves pic-

Digitized by Google

"At last, gamin of the gutter, we are quits."

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

ture it, M'sieurs? Myself, with the Duke's men-at-arms, silent in the gloom of the corridor; Isabelle, Fagot and De Brie seated in the Great Hall at the Duke's table, dining off the Duke's plate and waited on by the Duke's menials; then, just as the entree was served, M'sieurs, myself on the threshold, rapier in hand, and Isabelle —

Ah, Messieurs! The sight of Isabelle at that magic moment shall dwell in my mental gaze till the end of all. Rising calmly, as if to drain a toast, she played her part to the letter.

"At last, gamin of the gutter!" she cried, flicking the spurious mole from Fagot's detestable chin and into his brimming wine cup. "At last, gamin of the gutter, we are quits!"

Fagot, taken aback with surprise and alarm, cowered in his seat, but De Brie, scenting danger, arose and drew his blade.

"*Diable!*" he roared, with a soldier's oath. "'T is the finish!" And in a flash of the eye both he and Fagot were helpless in the grip of the men-at-arms.

"To the keep with them!" I commanded, speaking to the captain of the guard. "And, mark you, bind them well lest they escape. To the keep with them!"

Scarce were the words uttered, M'sieurs, when a furious clatter, a rush of many feet and a jingle of spurs, arose from below. I glanced

Digitized by Google

fearfully toward the door. Isabelle stood motionless. Fagot and De Brie, despairing though they were, raised their eyes anew. Then came a growing volume of voices that caused my heart to bound wildly.

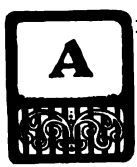
"*C'est le Duc! C'est le Duc!*" was the cry.

A final clatter, a final jingle of spurs, a final shout, and there, standing in the doorway, even as I had stood five minutes before, stood the real Duke des Pommes de Terre; — escaped, released, I know not which, M'sieurs, from the Café de la Paix!

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER VII.

In Which a Great Historical Mystery is Solved.



H, but those were days of quick thinking and often of quicker action. Dynasties were moved by the sudden impulses of most emergent moments, and such a moment had arrived for Huevos Pasada Par Agua, and foregad, it was not his skin so much as his neck that stood in peril. Imagine it, M'sieur. Here was I masquerading as the real Duke des Pommes de Terre, confronted by the man himself, who had been mocked, put upon, deprived of his liberty, and all for what? *Because, forsooth, he had declined to enter into a conspiracy against the Crown itself!* I could already feel the noose tightened about my neck, could hear the squeak of the gallows steps as I mounted them for my last appearance on any stage — and yet, my word on it as a gentleman and a Paté de Foie Gras, more intolerable to me was the thought of the loss of Isabelle, whom I had come to love passionately. What were home, father and mother, what was family, what were the innumerable fiancées I had left behind me in Brittany, Normandy, Provence

Digitized by Google

and old Castile to this new love that had awakened my heart? Nothing, I swore by the sacred helmet of Vin Blanc himself.

"Brochette is dead," I murmured; "long live the Duke des Pommes de Terre!"

Then aloud, quick as a flash, fixing a steely gray eye upon the real Duke, I asked sternly:

"Your errand, Sirrah?"

"What would you do?" gasped Isabelle, sinking back in a fainting condition. "Be not too rash, my Huevos!"

"Fear not, sweetheart," I whispered, hurriedly. "Only be staunch and true to me."

"Till death!" she murmured, revived by my unfaltering courage, and drawing herself up proudly and glancing haughtily at the real Duke.

"My errand?" screamed the latter, taken completely off his poise by my calmness. "My errand, in my own Chateau? *Ventre Saint Verdigris*, but this is too much!"

"'T is well to ask too much," I retorted, "since the too little that one gets may yet be more than enough. Your own Chateau, M'sieur?" I added. "What lunacy is this?"

"Lunacy?" he shouted. "Aye, my own Chateau. Is not this the Chateau Pommes de Terre Au Gratin?"

"Yes — what then?" I demanded, with a contemptuous smile.

Digitized by Google

"What then?" roared Pommes de Terre. "Now, by our Lady of Gorgonzola, this is again too much!"

"This is twice too much," I acquiesced, seeing from his growing wrath that I held the affair well in hand.

"But I — I am the Duke des Pommes de Terre — am I not?" he cried, hoarsely gutteral in his speech.

"Laugh — laugh as you value my life!" I whispered hurriedly in my Isabelle's ear. "This is the crisis."

And even as I spoke the tinkling ripple of her laughter filled the hall.

"Ha, ha!" I too burst forth. "A merry jest, my Lords and Gentlemen. *He* the Duke des Pommes de Terre, setting up his claim in the face of me your overlord and Prince by birth! By the Beard of my Ancestors, but thou art a brave clown, Sirrah, thus to enter the very banquet hall of the Royal Chateau and set up so strange a claim."

The effect was instantaneous. The Duke's guard and the castle retainers had already shown a disconcerting uncertainty and it required but a feather's weight to turn the scale for or against me, but the laughter of Isabelle and our bluff retort made for a successful issue out of my present embarrassments.

Digitized by Google

"Merry jest, sayst thou?" roared the Duke, leaping toward me, his hand on the hilt of his sword.

"Aye," said I, my brow furrowing into a frown; "but, by my halidome, see that thou carryest it not too far or else will I have thee strung high in yonder orchard close, even as did my venerated ancestor Louis the Eleventh of sacred memory with those who did offend him."

These words were spoken with a deliberate intent to offend my new enemy and at the same time to impress the arrayed witnesses to an astonishing scene. It had the desired effect, though after a fashion I had not reckoned on, for the Duke des Pommes de Terre, enraged beyond control, now leaped upon the table and waving his rapier high above him, gave voice to the battle-cry of his clan.

"*A moi, les Pommes Soufflés — a moi!*"

It was a brave act, and as the men-at-arms, halberds drawn and buskins primed to the muzzle, thronged in from the corridors without, my heart sank, for their force was overwhelming, and there sat I, caught like a rat in a corner, with no hope of getting out of it save by the use of what wits the patron saint of a d'en Brochette had given him.

"We are lost!" moaned Isabelle; and, by my faith, but for the despair in that dear voice I

Digitized by Google

"Then look at yon pretender, ... gentlemen!"

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

believe we all would have been. 'T was that alone that spurred me on to redoubled effort.

Raising my hand and summoning all the imperiousness of a masterful nature to my aid I commanded silence.

"Gentlemen," said I, as the din of many voices subsided and some semblance of order had been restored. "Gentlemen — I beg of you — one moment ere we proceed to stern measures. A question of identity has arisen between that — er — that gentleman and myself. He claims that he is I, when by a single glance you can see that he is *not* I."

"*C'est vrai — tres vrai!*" murmured one or two of the hotter heads who had come uncomfortable close.

"*Bien*," I continued, "now let us reason this out and if I am in the wrong let me bear my punishment. The Duke des Pommes de Terre, gentlemen, is a gentleman above all."

"He is! He is!" came shouts from all parts of the room.

"Then look at yon pretender, as he stands sword in hand upon the dining table, gentlemen — *upon the dining table*, mark you, — his left foot planted upon a golden fruit compote, his right crushing beneath its weight the exquisite confection which our chef had prepared for this lady and myself," — and by a graceful wave of my

Digitized by Google

hand I called their attention to Isabelle, who with the high color mounting to her cheeks looked more beautiful than ever. "Is that, my lords and gentlemen, the behavior of a Prince of blood? Is it the act of a gentleman to spring upon the milk-white napery of a Ducal board while yet his heels are clad in the boots in which he has travelled the muddy roads of France?"

A hoarse murmur of disapproval fell upon the true Duke's ears. Verily, the battle was going my way.

"Look at his spurs!" I continued with vehemence. "The steel point of the right spur in his mad flight to this strange position in which you see him has torn the gold lace from the cloak of my good friend the Marquis of Hors D'Ouvre. Upon the left you will see the socket of yonder candelabrum which he has crushed out of all semblance to the lovely handiwork of Benvenuto Cellini which once graced my table — and all this work of destruction, this clamor and this din, this invitation to a brawl unworthy of the tap-room — this gentleman indulged in in the presence of this fair lady — my fiancée — your future Duchess."

The turmoil that ensued was indescribable. The Duke, seeing the tide turning against him and his cause hopeless, since by no peradventure was there any gainsaying the justice of my scorn-

Digitized by Google

ful indictment of his breeding, albeit he was in truth better bred than I, jumped madly from the table and was making his way to the door.

"*À la lanterne!*" cried the now thoroughly aroused retainers, surging about him threateningly.

"Nay, gentlemen!" I cried, "no violence. The man is mad, bring him hither."

"Noble Brochette!" whispered Isabelle with a soft pressure of my hand which set my whole being to tingling. "You have spared his life."

"It shall not be death," I continued. "'T was but a madman's prank."

"The mask!" they cried. "The iron mask and the Bastille, that he may never again deceive us by his marvellous likeness to your grace. The mask and the Bastille!"

It was an inspiration, and I must confess my heart leapt wildly at the thought of this easy and permanent way out of my poverty and predicament. The real Duke, his countenance forever hid within the cold steel mask, could ne'er again demand recognition, and once clapped into the Bastille as an enemy to the King, what hope was there for him? And yet I hesitated, for the poor Prince had never injured me, was even now demanding only his rights — and again I looked on the face of fair Isabelle

Digitized by Google

and scruple fled. To abandon this only way out of our dreadful troubles was to abandon Isabelle to him, and myself, unwittingly forced by the tide of circumstances into all my recent actions, to the gallows, thereby placing the first blot on the escutcheon of a proud and noble family. Moreover 't was but an accident of birth that made me a Paté de Foie Gras and him a Pommes de Terre. Had my grandmother married her first betrothed instead of eloping with my grandfather, should I not have been born to the title? 'T was merely nature insisting upon my destiny, and I yielded. Do you blame me, M'sieurs?

"Aye, the mask!" I cried; "but the Bastille, that is as my uncle the King shall say. The mask, the mask."

The ugly instrument was brought at once from the armory and without more ado was placed upon the head of him who but yesterday was the proudest Prince in all France, he protesting and fighting valiantly the while, but against overwhelming odds.

"To the donjon with him to await the King's pleasure!" I cried. "Meanwhile, saddle my horse, Simon, and I will ride to Paris and lay the question before his majesty at once."

With cheers for myself, maledictions for the victim of my wit, and many a salutation of

Digitized by Google

"To the donjon with him," I cried.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

respect to my future Duchess, the men-at-arms and other retainers, little suspecting the real truth, hustled the unhappy Prince below. Simon sallied forth to saddle a fresh steed for my journey to Paris, and thinking myself at last alone with Isabelle I turned to greet her.

Imagine my consternation, M'sieurs, to find her gone, and standing between me and the doorway to her apartment no less a person than the Chevalier de Brie, Captain of the Camembert Guards.

"At last, my Lord Duke!" he hissed ironically. "At last we meet."

"The Duchess!" I cried. "And Fagot?"

His answer was a mocking laugh.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER VIII.

In Which the Chevalier De Brié Connects With What Was Coming to Him.

LUSHED with victory, insolent with success, I surveyed the Chevalier de Brie, who barred my way to Isabelle, with immeasurable, unfathomable contempt.

"*Ventre de skate!*" I cried, laying my hand upon a bell cord. "I have but to pull this, jackal, and your bones will bleach through the centuries at the bottom of the chateau's *oubliette*. Stand aside, hyena, or I will summon the guard."

"*Feigling!*" hissed the Captain of the Camembert Carabiniers, his face a purplish gray. "*Feigling!*"

The epithet stung me like a whiplash, all the more because 't was couched in German, a language, M'sieurs, I have detested ever since (if you will pardon the anachronism) the distressing affair of Alsace-Lorraine.

I stayed my hand for a few moments of indecision, then flung the bell-cord scornfully from me.

"No, jackal," quoth I, "I shall not sum-

Digitized by Google

mon the guard. It would be said that I feared you — you who are accounted the lustiest bravo in all France. Instead" — my words were tipped with steel — "I shall kill you with your favorite weapon. You that have lived by the sword shall perish by the sword. Follow me!"

I preceded the bravo to the small dining-room and rang for lights and food.

"My dear Chevalier," I said mockingly, and with that icy politeness which I knew so well how to assume, "when the new hour begins I shall spit you like a well-done potato. Meantime, pray accept my hospitality. We shall fight much better on a filled stomach, I assure you. If you remember, we did but come to the *entrée* when our dinner was interrupted by that unhappy man on whom the Bastille gates will soon forever close."

"*Saint Paty du Clam!*" growled de Brie cavernously, "thou art a greater villain than Fagot. He did but detain the Duke in the wine cellar of the Café de la Paix, whilst you . . . ." He drained his wine goblet at a gulp.

"A Brochette does not do things by halves, M'sieur," said I, with a glittering smile, and signed to the serving man to refill the goblets. "When once a Brochette puts his hand to the sword and his shoulder to the wheel he does not

Digitized by Google

descend the ladder. What think you of that for a metaphor? Ha!"

"Bah!" cried de Brie, attacking a capon.

"When I have killed you and Fagot my secret will be safe," I continued. "History will pretend that the Man with the Iron Mask was Count Matthioli, or Général de Bulonde, or the Duke of Vermondois, or that soldier of fortune the gallant Marechiel, or I know not else. But none shall penetrate his real identity until are given to the world the incomparable memoirs of Robert Gaston de Launay Alphonse, Count Paté de Foie Gras and Marquis Presumptive of the Estates of Pollio Grille in Spain."

"Bah!" said de Brie, draining his glass.

"Eat, drink and be merry, my friend, for in the next hour you die!" I pointed to a Swiss clock on the wall, ticking off the inexorable minutes.

"Bah!" said the Carabinier again, and rose to his feet. "Come, let us to it. *Saint Dreyfus!* I shall prod thee as full of holes as a colander."

"Be seated!" I thundered. De Brie dropped back in his chair, scowling darkly. "You are but a churlish guest, *ma foi!* Restrain your temper; you will fight the better for it. And try one of these cigars; they are excellent. Not that you will not smoke in the next world," I added,

Digitized by Google

maliciously. This in the days I write of was accounted a very good jest.

With an ill grace De Brie lighted a perfecto and flung himself back in his chair. "I am no entertainer, your Grace," said he, with ironic emphasis upon the title. "I am but a plain fighting man, and, 'fore gad, I fret to be at the game that I may slit thy soul."

"The soul, Chevalier, is indestructible, unslittable. Were there time," I glanced again at the clock, "I should discourse to thee about the soul. As 't is, thou 'rt in a fair way to know more about it than I can teach thee. What, ho! more lights!" I commanded. "And turn on the music."

A company of minstrels entered, and ranging themselves in a semi-circle sang songs of the sunny South; and for the remainder of the hour we smoked in silence, De Brie moody, myself wholly engrossed in the music.

The Swiss clock struck the hour, and De Brie sprang to his feet. I signed to the serving men to remove the table and other furniture and then to close the doors upon us.

"Will you measure the swords, M'sieur?" said I.

De Brie drew a tape from his doublet and stretched it along his blade. "Six feet seven inches," he announced.

Digitized by Google

"*Ma foi!*" I cried, "why not carry a spear? My rapier is scant six feet. However, 't will serve."

I unfastened my *pourpoint*, loosened my suspenders and removed my boots, De Brie following suit.

"And now, M'sieur," I remarked, testing the tip of my rapier, "is there any particular place you would like to be run through?"

"Bah!" growled the Chevalier, and the blades met hissingly.

The Captain of the Carabiniers attacked like a sea-lion bereft of its young, but finding me a wall of steel he grew more careful and attentive. For my part I had never before encountered so stubborn a blade, and I give you my word, M'sieurs, we fought an hour by the Swiss clock without either gaining the advantage of the other.

"*Saint Paty du Clam!*" puffed De Brie, leaning on his blade, "you fight like the devil, M'sieur."

"A bottle of wine, Chevalier?" I suggested. "We have all the time there is."

"No, no," replied De Brie, falling again into position. "Let us finish. *À la mort!*"

"You have some reason for your haste!" I cried, pierced by a sudden suspicion. A malignant smile traversed De Brie's coarse features as the supple blades joined.

Digitized by Google

"Six feet seven inches," he announced.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

"What devil's work is afoot?" I wondered. In my zeal politely to entertain and kill the bravo I had forgotten my beauteous mistress Isabelle, who might even now be victim of another hellish plot.

"Jackal!" I hissed. "Where is Fagot?"

De Brie's reply was a fierce lunge, which I parried in my usual neat and nobby fashion.

"*Ventre de blanc mange!*" I cried. "You are in haste, M'sieur. *Tres bien*, you shall be satisfied."

I became a very whirlwind of attack, driving the bravo before me like an autumn leaf before an equinoctial gale. *À la tierce, à la carte, à la table d'hôte*, my blade forked like lightning through his guard, puncturing him now here, now there, until he streamed like the colander he vaunted he should make of me.

"They say, M'sieur," I mocked, as I enlarged a hole in his chest, "that lightning does not strike twice in the same place; but, *voila!*" —I ran him through the third time, and he fell crashingly on the tessellated floor.

I pulled the bellcord, but not a servitor responded. I flung open the doors. A hoarse murmur came distantly to my ears.

"*Sacre nom de plume!*" I exclaimed, awed by a feeling of impending disaster.

I turned back for a final look at De Brie.

Digitized by Google

He had raised himself on his elbow, and was regarding me with a last malignant smile. His countenance was contorted with hatred.

Bang!

A terrific explosion rocked the chateau. The walls of the rooms fell out, the roof fell in. By a miracle I escaped being crushed by the rain of stone and timber. A hollow groan told me that De Brie had not been so fortunate. It was pitch dark, so I could not locate him. But I shouted:

"De Brie, De Brie, what has happened? Speak, De Brie!"

A rattling laugh answered me.

"The *debris* speaks for itself," the carabinier jested in his last moments. "*Fagot has blown up the chateau! Saint Dreyfus!* Half of it is on my chest."

"Courage!" I cried, and guided by his groans I reached his side.

A lurid glare had replaced the Cimmerian gloom. The ruins of the chateau were in flames.

The unfortunate De Brie was pinned down by an enormous block of stone. This I tossed aside, and hastily examined the bravo's condition.

Nothing could be done for him, and so I informed him.

"*Merci*, Sir Doctor, and search my pockets for your fee," he sneered. "*Ventre de petit pois!* I had this coming to me. Adieu, your Grace!"

Digitized by Google

"A terrific explosion rocked the chateau."

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

With this last fling at my ducal pretensions the bravo fell back — dead.

Now to save myself and the beauteous Isabelle. It was high time. The flames were crackling all about me, and above the roar of them I fancied I heard the exultant laugh of the detestable Fagot.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER IX.

In Which There are Live and Dead Ones.

How I escaped death, M'sieurs, will ever to me be a mystery. *Mon Dieu!* The horror of that fearful instant! From light to pitchy blackness; from security to utter chaos; from laughter, music and feasting to groans and horror indescribable; from earth to eternity; and all, M'sieurs, in one brief moment.

How much of the Chateau was still intact, how much of it had fallen I knew not, and no mind had I at the time to ascertain. My first thought, my all absorbing thought, was of Isabelle. Where was she? Had she, like myself, been spared by a miracle; or was she, like the Chevalier de Brie, a lifeless —? *Mon Dieu!* Even now, and years afterward, I shudder as I think and tell of it.

I knew not then as I staggered to my feet and stumbled dizzily for the first few steps that the doings of the night were far from over. I knew not then, what is more, that the wretched Fagot's cowardly crime would set a new scene in the drama of D'en Brochette; that ere the

Digitized by Google

night was through, I would be a witness of developments impossible had the stones of Chateau Pommes de Terre remained, as they had been before, one atop the other. Lastly, I recked not that for the time being even thoughts of Isabelle would be driven from my mind; only to return, however, a thousand fold on the strength of that which I was to see and hear. *Pardieu!* M'sieurs, that was a night!

Shaken, bewildered, but still with a sense of direction, I felt my way o'er a mass of building material to the door of the room in which De Brie and I, but minutes before, had supped and fought. Through a shattered window, a ray of moonlight shone, and creeping inch by inch toward the center of the floor, it bathed the face of the dead De Brie, fixed and grim, in a ghastly hue. Some wreckage from the table had fallen on the Chevalier's breast-plate, and peering closer, an upturned dish of *Glace de Peches à la Creme* I perceived it to be.

"By *Saint Entremet!*" I muttered, laughing the while a low, unearthly laugh. "Thou hast, indeed, thy desserts, Chevalier. *Sacre nom de diable!* What is that?"

Straight before me, M'sieurs, mingling the fitful light of a candle with the feeble illuming of a waning moon, I saw a portly female of middle age. Her dress, of a whitish material and of a

Digitized by Google

strange bygone fashion, was much disordered. Her hair, likewise. But her eyes — *parbleu!* — they burned and flashed with a fire unquenchable. In her right hand she carried what I judged to be a mahogany table-leg. In her left, high above her head, evidently to guide her through the mazes of the chateau on some ghostly quest, she held a single candle.

Easily could I have kept from her sight had the thought occurred to me, or the need required it, but so struck was I with the unlooked for spectacle — a spectre-like female, solitary and silent, treading her way at midnight through a ruined chateau — that for the moment I gave no thought to self at all; and thus it was she saw me when but inches of floor space were between us.

For perchance four seconds, she gleamed, glowed, glared at me with those demon eyes and then —

"At last!" she hissed.

"At last!!" she cried.

"At last, Gaspard Henri Pierre, Duke des Pommes de Terre," she was screaming now, and her voice broke twice with vindictive passion. "At last, after fourteen years, we face each other. Who knows better than I the purpose of this plot of plots? Who knows better than I whom you designed to kill — aye, to kill — when with

Digitized by Google

She gleamed at me with those demon eyes.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

giant-powder you achieved this wreck of wrecks? Who knows, better than I, knave of knaves, that your shameless schemes are frustrated? I am free once more. The explosion, which basely you planned and executed, hoping thereby for the death of your lawful and wedded wife, did but burst asunder the walls of her secret prison, and she — she — it left unscathed. Varlet, this is but the first!"

With a swiftness and suddenness remarkable in one so aged, and so liberally endowed with averdupois, this foaming, fuming female, this hag of Hades, drew back the table-leg which she carried and brought it down full force in line with my unclad head. With an oath, I dodged, but at that, the thing descended on my shoulder, and half felled me.

"*Ventre Moulin Rouge*, woman!" I cursed. "What fiend's deed is this? Who are you — speak!"

Then ere she could answer, the dame's frenzied words flashed o'er me and behold! I knew. "His lawful and wedded wife." Whose forsooth? Why, who else but the Duke des Pommes de Terre, M'sieurs. He, and no other. And this woman, the Duchess, if her words were true, had been walled up a prisoner in her own domicile for fourteen years; the Duke, meanwhile, as a bachelor or a widower — I knew not which he

Digitized by Google

called himself — having gaily gadded from one end of France to the other.

"And thrice spit him!" thought I, in a rage, "betrothed at this moment, if he be still alive, to the virtuous, the incomparable Isabelle!"

Thanking the fates for their timely interruption, I made up my mind instanter. This masquerading should cease.

"Madame," I cried. "Your Grace — I crave your pardon, but I am not your husband."

"Not my husband?" she queried, incredulously. "Not the Duke? Then who, i' the devil's name, are ye?"

She was fingering the table-leg again and discreetly I drew back.

"'T is even so," she said at length, after scanning me well in the candle light, "you are not he. You are a younger man. But so like, so like."

"See," added I. "Reck you that His Grace, your beloved spouse, was possessed among other things of a mole? Behold!" — and with a deft movement, I flicked the putty from my chin.

"Enough!" cried the Duchess, "I am quite convinced. Deprive yourself of nothing more, M'sieur, I beg." And then, in something of the shrewish voice in which I first had heard her speak — "But if you are not the Duke, in truth,

Digitized by Google

then where is *he?* Where is the prop of my declining years? My soul's affinity? Answer! But do not tell me he is dead."

She was screaming again and her screams echoed and re-echoed through the dark and silent chateau — silent save only for the drop, from battlements to wine vaults, of an occasional girder.

"Your Grace," I began, bowing low, "My lord, the Duke, to the best of my poor knowledge and belief, is alive and fairly well; though, it may be, a trifle shaken up."

"For that, the Saints be glorified!" she cried. "New zest and keen hath it added to the chase. And I shall find him — where, M'sieur?"

"In the bottom-most cell of the Keep, your Grace."

"Whither he went to escape destruction, I doubt not, whilst some of his minions blew up the Chateau. Blew up this chateau! — Hah! the wretch of wretches! — which, mark me, M'sieur, he has held for years in my name! On to the keep. And you, M'sieur, take you the light and prithee lead the way."

She was raving again and twitching the table-leg.

Over piles of debris, over beams and timber, over furniture in hopeless chaos and floors bestrewn with stone and mortar, we took our

Digitized by Google

painful way to the gloom of the donjon. Not a trace of a guard, alive or dead, was to be seen, but there, almost under our feet, as we crept cautiously along, I saw with a thrill — shall I say a thrill of triumph, M'sieurs? — the body of Jules Fagot.

"'T is he!" shrieked the Duchess, as she came within the circle of light. "Killed! Killed! And I not by his side!"

The Duchess was sobbing now.

"Ah, M'sieur," she added, grimly, I thought, "in my present mood, five minutes by his side would have been quite sufficient, both for him and for me."

Should I tell this woman, pondered I, that once again she was mistaken? Should Fagot be honored, even in death, by the attentions of a Duchess? I hesitated, M'sieurs; and then, as if expressly to dispel my doubts, we heard a cry.

"*A moi, les Pommes Souffles, a moi!*" were the muffled words. The voice came from the depths of the keep, at the entrance to which we stood, and I recognized it at once as the Duke's own. Instantly I stole a glance at the Duchess. She, too, had recognized.

"M'sieur," she said, and how strangely calm her voice was now, "I wot not how many Dukes this house hath harbored since, fourteen years

Digitized by Google

"The mask, I beseech ye?"

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

come Micklemas, I was brutally thrust in a secret chamber and guarded, but that, M'sieur of the putty mole, is the voice of the Duke I used to know. The key is there, M'sieur. Unlock you the door."

"Prithee, your Grace, one moment," murmured I, my hand on the massive bolt. "Is 't courteous, think you, to now disturb my lord, the Duke? He may wish to spend in meditation the few remaining hours of his bachelorhood. His Grace — I no longer can conceal it — His Grace is betrothed to one Isabelle, the reigning Paris beauty, and the wedding, so 't is said, is set for Tuesday at high noon."

What a scream was that, M'sieurs, which sounded in my open ears! *Parbleau!* Beside it, the others had been whispered nothings.

"Betrothed! Married! High Noon!" shrieked the Duchess. "*Sacre Beurre Noir!* Stand aside and let me to him!"

Wide I swung the donjon door.

"Coming, Gaspard Henri Pierre!" shrilled this Fury Emeritus, rushing headlong down the passage toward a dim light at the farther end. "Coming, Gaspard, after fourteen years. *À moi, les Pommes Souffles, à moi!*"

Fast as I could, I followed, but even so, my speed was that of the snail compared with hers. Mercury himself, i' faith, knew no such winged feet,

Digitized by Google

When at length I reached the cell, in which but scant two hours before — how like an age it seemed — I, d'en Brochette, had ordered the Duke cast, I witnessed a tableau that will ever come before me, an' I choose to recall it.

Parbleu! If great is the fury of a woman scorned, what may not the anger be of one locked up for fourteen years? I saw with a start that the Duke's head was bare. The Iron Mask — to this day, M'sieurs, I marvel at it — lay cracked and broken on the damp stone floor. To this day, moreover, I wot not whether it was the concussion of Fagot's blast that loosened it, or whether 't was the table-leg in the lusty grasp of Her Grace.

"The Mask! The Mask!" the Duke in his chains was groaning. "*Sacre Saumon Hollandaise!* The Mask, I beseech ye. Once more within it encase my hapless head. To the Bastille with me! To the gallows! To the devil! But away from Pommes de Terre!"

There was a grating in the masonry of the Duke's cell, a cell so deep that it had escaped the devastation above. It communicated with the outer air just atop the level of the water and from it the outer wall and the principal gate of the chateau were plainly to be seen in the flood of moonlight. On this gate, then, at the very moment the Duke brought his tirade to an end,

Digitized by Google

there fell a steady succession of mighty blows, delivered it must seem, with fists of mail, so all compelling were they. Then there came stern shouts — and *Ma foi!* — Have your hearts ever tenanted your throats, M'sieurs? Mine, forsooth, arose straightway.

"Open!" came the stern command. "Open, at once, in the King's name!"

"In the King's name!" I gasped blankly.

"The King?" said the Duchess, pleasantly. "Prithee, who *is* King now? Details like that were not vouchsafed me in the fourteen years just past."

"The King?" muttered the Duke, in rapidly growing delirium. "The King, say you? Aye, bid him welcome. Open the gates. Down with the draw-bridge, vassals. Minions, attend, and receive your lord."

Then came the knocking and the shouting anew.

"OPEN? OPEN IN THE KING'S NAME?"

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER X.

In Which the King Takes a Hand.

THE MOMENT was more than a trial. It was torture. Not especially grateful ever to heaven for my relatives, I never had less stomach for an uncle real or spurious than now as I awaited the opening of the gates and the entrance of his sovereign Majesty, Louis the Fourteenth of the name. None the less there was I committed to the emprises fate held in store for me and my blood was up. No Huevos Pasada Par Agua had ever flinched in the hour of trouble, nor bent beneath another's yoke, and as the portals flung wide I drew myself up as proudly as though the man who was to enter was my inferior instead of my liege lord and master.

His Majesty was singularly agitated as he entered. It was evident from his demeanor that he suspected the bomb that had wrought such havoc on the fair demesne of Pommes de Terre, had been designed for himself, and from the expression of his countenance it was clear to me that upon whomsoever that day his displeasure might fall, the victim of his wrath would account the rack a bed of roses and the thumb-screw the

Digitized by Google

pressure of his loved one's hand beside the things the morrow would bring into his experience.

"What then, my nephew!" he cried addressing himself to me. "What means this untoward reception to your uncle and your King?"

"I pray your Majesty pardon this disorder in my Chateau," I began. "We were not aware of the distinguished honor you were about to confer upon our house and certain alterations in the façade and interior of our humble dwelling —"

"Certain alterations?" roared his Majesty, visibly relieved by my reply. "Certain? By the beard of Navarre and all the white lilies of France, cousin, they seem to me to be conducted with much uncertainty."

"A careless workman, Sire," I returned, "may wreck much havoc with the fairest scenes."

"I 'faith, 't is true," quoth Louis. "I have e'en known La Valliere's tinted cheek to suffer from too rough a handling of the rouge."

With such a jest upon his lips, the King surveyed the scene of ruin. His haughty eye rested only for a moment upon the prostrate Pommes de Terre, who with his glance fixed upon the Duchess, was doing his utmost to crawl away into obscurity, and then —

"Hold!" cried the Duchess. "Hold, Sire — yon fair appearing wight is an imposter.

Digitized by Google

There lying like a worm upon the floor and seeking exit through some chancing crevice is thy nephew Gaspard Henri Pierre, Look, Sire — look upon him and then upon this man who claims a kingly kinship with thee, his sovereign lord."

"Peace, woman, peace," said the King. "Thy servants, cousin, do not seem to me —"

"It shall not be," shrieked the Duchess in the frenzy of her anger. "Look, Sire," she continued, levelling her shaking finger at me, "if not upon the worm at least upon the fox. Hath he the mole, the hall-mark of the Duke des Pommes de Terre?"

"Pray, Madame," said the King drawing himself up with dignity, "the question 's not who 's he who lies upon the floor, nor if the man who seems to be my well-beloved nephew hath the mole, but who art thou who thus presume —"

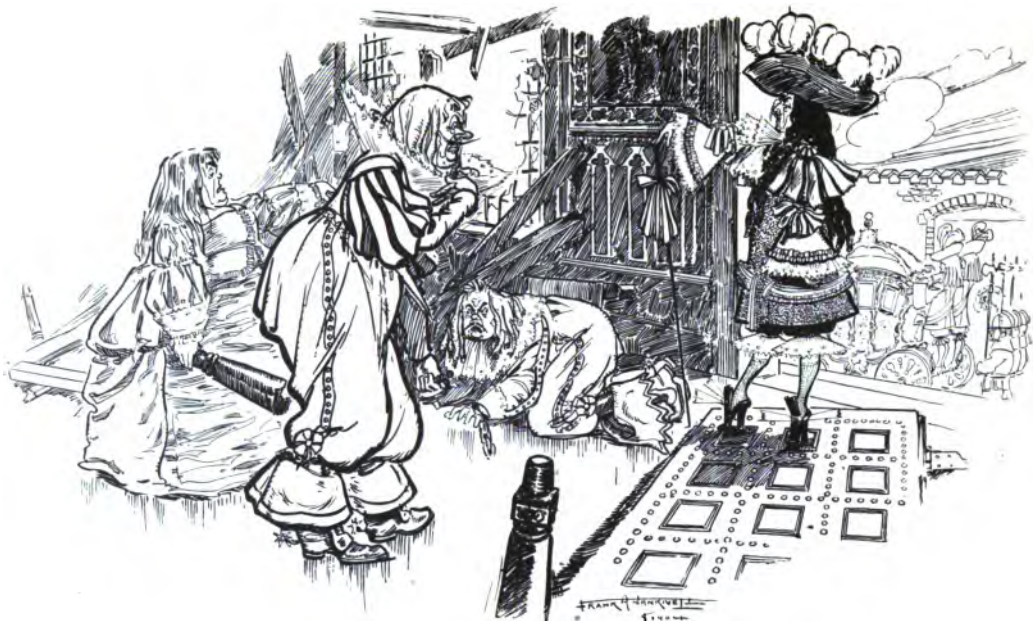
"Marie Louise Nanette Babette Anne Katharine of Chambertin, the loyal wife and Duchess of yon grovelling Duke des Pommes de Terre," she cried. "Thy niece by marriage, but thine aunt by birth —"

"You?" cried the King.

"*Oui! Moi* — I am she," wept the woman.

The King was moved and with a troubled frown upon his face glanced first at Gaspard

Digitized by Google



"And with this, I pointed to my bleeding chin."

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

and then at me, but my wits saved me. The temporary diversion of his Majesty's attention from myself, caught here beyond peradventure without the mole, to Madame La Duchesse, had given me time to gash my chin with a bit of jagged rock that lay at my feet, splintered from a gargoyle fallen from the roof.

"What say you to this lady's claims, my cousin?" the King demanded with a frown. "The mole in very truth should bear witness to her contentions."

I turned my torn countenance full upon the King and drew myself up to my full height.

"The lady, as a lady ever, should hath spoken the truth about the mole, dear uncle," I replied. "And it grieves me much that now when first I find my title questioned, circumstance hath so ordered things that it may not be produced."

"May not be produced, man?" growled the King, his brow furrowing with mistrust, and advancing a step.

"It may not be, your Majesty," quoth I, "for when the blast untimely pulled the chateau down about mine ears, this wretched bit of gargoyle served me thus."

And with this I pointed to my bleeding chin.

"Crushed like a rat e'en though a simple

Digitized by Google

mole," I added. "Gone — the choicest heritage of my ancestors, the heir-loom that I 've prized and eke protected all these many years, sent burrowing whither I know not. All I know is 't is gone."

"*Ventre d'Haricots verts*, but this is passing strange," muttered the King, turning from me and looking sternly at the Duchess. "My nephew's explanation, Madame, hath much plausibility."

A wild laugh was the response.

"Ask yonder worm the truth," was her disdainful comment, and then, M'sieurs, such grovelling actions as the prostrate Duke indulged in. It seemed as if he were possessed to grate his face away upon the rock and gravel 'neath his jowl. Were he indeed the missing mole itself personified, no more anxious burrowing into Mother-earth could have been expected of him. Fate trembled in the balance and there was I helpless to throw a bit of weight in either scale.

"Rise, groveller," ordered the King addressing the Duke, "and let us see what truth lies in this lady's accusation. Hast *thou* the mole?"

The Duke rose up and with hang-dog look and shuffling feet approached his Majesty. A glance at his face showed me I was saved. The reasons for his burrowings were now made clear.

He had flayed the mole away by attrition with the earth.

Digitized by Google

"Who art thou, man?" demanded the King. "Art thou in truth the Duke des Pommes de Terre?"

Again it seemed as if my life hung on his lips, but as I saw him cringe before the glowering glances of the Duchess, my courage mounted high. 'T was clear that death itself were preferable in his mind to live with such a one.

"I 'm not the Duke, Majesty," he replied. "*My name is Fagot — Jules Fagot* — your Graciousness."

"Fagot?"

"Aye, Majesty, Fagot — *valet de cuisine*, Café de la Paix, Paris."

"What do you here?"

"I have come, Your Majesty, to wreak vengeance upon yon tyrannous Gaspard Henri Pierre, who worked me wretched wrong. 'T was I blew up the Chateau. 'T is I, oh grand and glorious monarch, who hath wrought this ruin, and I await my punishment, no matter what it be."

"He lies —," the Duchess began, waving her hands and preparing to rush upon the Duke.

"Peace, woman!" cried the King, restraining her with a gesture. "His shrift will be a short one if but half his tale is true without thy further calumnies. Speak, nephew, know you this Fagot?"

Digitized by Google

"I know him well, Sire," I replied. "Too well, in fact. The wrong I did him was to beat him well for offences that he knows of—"

"Of what nature?" demanded the King.

"He brought me Moselle wines in place of Chambertin, and at the breaking of my fast on Monday last 't was he poured bromides in my sauce in place of salt," I replied. "For this I trounced him well. For that hath he destroyed my home."

"The penalty is death!" cried the King, shrinking from the malefactor in aversion.

"Nay, uncle, not so," I protested, not wishing to have the crime of murder on my soul. "Let us be merciful. I doubt me not the man hath suffered much from me and my kind in my roisterous days at Paris, and the first offense was but the vengefulness of an untutored mind. This last more serious crime but shows him mentally deformed. Give him to me, my King — a small favor, Sire — and let me deal with him, according to my whim."

"Ah, Softheart!" cried the King. "'T was ever a weakness of thine, Gaspard, but it shall be as you wish."

"A blank warrant of commitment to the Bastille, and I shall be satisfied," was my reply.

Tapping me on the shoulder affectionately, his Majesty, ordering his Chamberlain to fulfill

Digitized by Google

And in a moment more, I was folded in her arms.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

my wishes, passed on into what remained of the gardens, leaving me alone with the Duchess and the self-denying Duke.

"There is another mask below, Your Grace," suggested the Duke. "While that woman lives I shall account the Bastille and the iron visor comfort — the one to sequestrate my body from her approach, the other lest perchance she have an opportunity again to kiss me."

And so it was. In a jiffy's time the new mask was adjusted upon the shoulders of the Duke, the commitment signed by the royal hand was filled in the name of Fagot, and under strong guard Gaspard Henri Pierre, Duke des Pommes de Terre, was on his way to the dungeons of the dread prison house of France, the Bastille. There let us leave him to the consideration of history. He does not enter again upon my narrative.

The Duke disposed of thus, I turned to join the King, when, fury of furies, the worst of all befell. The Duchess, resolved to make the best of existing conditions, now stood between me and the garden gate, her hag-like face lit up by the fires of love, her bosom heaving with emotion.

"Forgive me, my Gaspard, for having doubted," she cried, and in a moment I was folded in her arms.

Digitized by Google

Ventre Saint Café Noir, but if this woman's wrath were a thing to be feared, her love was to be dreaded ten times more.

"Ye Gods!" I cried in a muffled voice, as she amorously pressed my nose against her breast-pin.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XI.

La Beldam Sans Merci and La Belle Isabelle.

"UNHAND ME, woman!" I cried, and sought to break the amorous clutch in which the Duchess held me. But as the ivy clings to the oak, or the devil-fish to its prey, the infatuated woman hung on. I must temporize.

"Enough, Marie," I said. "I do surrender — I am thine for all eternity."

With a cry of joy she pressed my unhappy nose still more erotically against her breast-pin. *Ventre Verdi Gris!* It is sore to this day.

"And you will never donjon your little Marie again?" she whimpered.

"Never, on my honor as a Pommes de Terre au Gratin!"

Reluctantly she unclasped her arms. I rubbed my proboscis ruefully.

"Poor 'ittle nosie!" she cooed, touching it tenderly. "Diddum naughty pin scratch him?"

"It diddum, Madame!" I roared. "By Cyrano, it diddum!"

The Duchess took my arm. "Let us leave this place, my love," she said. "It is frightfully out of repair."

Digitized by Google

I glanced around at the ruins of the chateau — the chaotic heap of toppled masonry and twisted girders. As a place of residence it was indeed *passé*, not to say *de trop*.

Not a soul was in sight. In the distance I heard the echoes of a bugle; the King was returning to Versailles. It was dark as Erebus, save for the flickering light from the flames of the wrecked chateau.

"We must put up at the hotel, sweet Marie," quoth I. "And appearance hath it that we shall walk perforce, for of horses and retainers I see nothing. Methinks the varlets have perished in the wreck. Remain here, my Sappho, whilst I repair to the village — 't is but half a league — for a conveyance for thy precious self."

"Nay, Gaspard; thou 'lt not leave me again," replied the Duchess, determined not to lose sight of her prey. "I shall accompany thee to the hotel on foot. I have need of exercise, my love, having taken on flesh during the past fourteen years. I acknowledge, my cruel Gaspard, thou hast fed me well."

"Come, then, my Helen of Troy," said I, with an inward groan. And we set forth toward Manchet, the Duchess with feet of thistledown and I with leaden heel.

En route I searched my wits for means to disencumber myself of La Beldam Sans Merci,

Digitized by Google

but could think of nothing short of murder; and this, with my customary delicacy, I shrank from. The hotel lights surprised me with not an idea in my pate — usually a tropic forest of ideas.

"My love, we will sup," I remarked, having registered.

"*Mon Dieu*, Gaspard, I was at the dessert when the Chateau blew up."

"Tush, sweetheart! The walk has given me an appetite," I insisted gently. And escorting her to the dining-room, I gave orders for a sumptuous repast.

Whilst this was preparing I engaged a suite of rooms for an indefinite period; and as the shops were still open, it being Saturday night, I despatched servants for a fresh wardrobe, bidding them purchase the most costly goods to be obtained. It was hard upon midnight when a cringing menial advised me that the banquet was prepared.

Despite her protest, the Duchess discovered an excellent appetite, and as we supped we chatted of many things — a new chateau to be built in the Spring, our winter house in town, a cruise in the Mediterranean. The Duchess cast on me the most languishing of glances, whilst I madly revolved in my mind a thousand futile avenues of escape from her Circean toils.

The expectant *valet de place*, with an ob-

Digitized by Google

sequious bow, laid beside my plate the bill for the repast. I glanced at the figures and started violently.

Two hundred and fifty-seven francs, thirty centimes!

"*Ventre de Gargantua!*" I murmured to myself. The precise amount, to a centime, M'sieurs, of the bill which my lost Isabelle had viséd for me at the Café D'Oeuf, in Paris, not forty-eight hours before! Again, at this touch of a vanished hand, a wave of passion swept over me.

Into those forty-eight hours had been crowded more incidents than the ordinary man experiences in a lifetime, even in these days of swash and buckler. Save for the hours I lay unconscious in the well at Croquante, I had not slept, nor was there prospect of my sleeping for days to come. I vowed to myself that I should not close my eyes until I had recovered Isabelle, if years were required to the search.

Now, as on that fateful morning when first I beheld my divinity, I was without a sou. Mechanically I thrust my hand in my pocket, though no purse was there, and drew forth a letter. I stared blankly at it, then suddenly I recalled that it was the letter to the Duke des Pommes de Terre which I had taken from the ill-fated courier on the road from Paris. The

Digitized by Google

seal was still unbroken. Like myself, the letter had had remarkable adventures.

Never, M'sieurs, was there stranger caprice of circumstances. I had become, for better or worse, the actual Duke des Pommes de Terre. The letter, therefore, was for my eyes. Thus was I in conspiracy against the King, as this fatal paper was unquestionably a link in the chain of plotting.

"From a woman, Gaspard?" queried the Duchess, kindling with jealousy.

"Nay, my love; 't is but a tailor's bill," I answered lightly, opening it.

Diable! It was in truth a tailor's dunning. It read:

> "To making one business suit, with extra breastplate and surcingle, 125 francs. To cleaning and riveting business suit, 10 francs. Please remit by messenger."

The paper fluttered from my hand. I sat dumfoundered.

"A message for the Duke des Pommes de Terre," announced the *valet de place*, laying a perfumed missive before me. My heart leaped: the perfume was Isabelle's. The Duchess snatched wildly at the letter, but I thrust her back in her chair and broke the seal of the odorous message.

Digitized by Google

One glance and my wild Brochette blood flamed for an instant action:

> "My Brave Brochette — True heroine of romance that I am, I am once more up against it. Come at once. Love will find the way.
>
> "Isabelle."

I leaped to my feet, upsetting my chair with a crash; and flinging the unpaid dinner bill at the Duchess, who fell fainting across the table, in three bounds I had gained the street and was running like a deer in the direction of Paris.

Love showed the way. Venus was evening star, and swung, a beckoning beacon, before me.

I had run a league or more when suddenly two dark shapes sprang up as from the earth and barred the highway. I reached for my sword, but — *sapristi!* — I was defenceless. Powerful arms seized me, a bandage was placed over my eyes, and I was hurried — whither I could make no shift at guessing.

Presently I heard a gate click; my feet touched gravel; I mounted a stair; the bandage was plucked from my eyes; — *Mon Dieu!* I beheld the beautiful Isabelle, her eyes shining like stars.

"My brave Brochette!" she cried, and sank into my arms.

"My pearl of fabulous price!" I murmured.

Digitized by Google

The Duchess snatched wildly at the letter.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

"It was very good of you to come, my brave Brochette."

"Now that I am here I shall never leave you!" I swore, and took tribute of the tremulous lips that neighbored mine.

"Oh, Robert," she murmured — "your name is Robert, is it not?"

"Robert Gaston de Launay Alphonse. Wear upon thy lips, my love, whichever name best pleases thee."

"I am undecided, my preserver, 'twixt Alphonse and Gaston. Both are sweet."

"'T is all one to me, sweetheart," said I. "Help yourself."

"Then Alphonse be it," she replied. "Oh, Alphonse, I feared you could not come to me; that fate, so inconsiderate of lovers, had placed you *hors du combat* once again."

"Tell me, my adored," I said, glancing about, "what is this place in which I find you?"

"'T is a villa, and deserted. Ask me not how I came here; 't would require an entire chapter, and time and space press — like thee," she said, pantingly. For a Brochette, M'sieurs, is a very bear at the game of hugging. "Thank heaven you are in time, my brave Alphonse. One fight more, my cavalier, and then our troubles will be over, and we shall live happily ever afterwards."

Digitized by Google

"Ha!" I cried, sniffing the battle afar off. "You expect an attack?"

"At any instant. Hark!" She raised a warning hand. A sound of breaking glass fell crunchingly upon the silence. "They are in the cucumber beds. In another minute they will force the door!"

"A sword! A sword! My dukedom for a sword!" I roared.

Isabelle ran lightly to a clothespress and drew forth a naked blade of 18-karat Toledo. I snatched it eagerly, and to test its temper ran it through a haircloth sofa.

"Shall we not barricade the door?" asked Isabelle, pushing the piano into position.

"Nay, my love," I replied. "We shall make it a staircase affair. With your sweet voice to encourage me, I could hold a stair against more men than fronted Horatius in the brave days of old."

A crash below stairs told me that the door had been forced. I sprang out upon the landing, Isabelle following with a piano lamp. A pack of armed ruffians were swarming up the stair.

"Twenty — count them — twenty!" cried Isabelle, her voice high with excitement. "A Brochette! A Brochette!"

I snatched a kiss from her scarlet lips, and

Digitized by Google

A pack of armed ruffians were swarming up the stair.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

bidding her hold the lamp high I turned to the work in hand.

"Twenty — count them — twenty!" cried Isabelle again. "Have at them, valiant Brochette."

And then, to the hireling cut-throats swarming on the stair:

"Come on, *canaille*, come on! I 'd have ye meet a gentleman — a gentleman of France!"

A chorus of maledictions swelled from the throats of the baying pack at the foot of the stair.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XII.

In Which There are Doings on the Stair.

IT was warm toil, M'sieurs. A second after Isabelle had issued her sweeping challenge, the foremost ruffians, with drawn swords, came bounding at me. Poor fools! They knew not who I was.

"By the mass, shrimps," I grimly jested, "Naught have I against ye save my blade, but that were more than enough, I trow, for such as ye."

'T was the work of an instant to extract my steel from the one and plunge it, quivering, into the other. Then, with their two bodies as a dead-line, I faced the eighteen scamps remaining. *Sapristi!* But the lust of the fight was strong upon me!

"Swine of the trough!" I roared in a terrible voice, while cowed momentarily by the loss of two of their number, the band hesitated, "Swine of the trough! Though the knife of the butcher were fitting steel for all of ye, sticking pigs in an abattoir was ne'er a fad of d'en Brochette's. I like not their squeal, to be frank with ye" — here I touched with buskin toe the

Digitized by Google

body of him nearest me — "And by your leave, sweet sirs, I'll finish this killing with dispatch."

"Now, by the Lord Harry, and by gad's daggers, blades and scabbards, no man shall call Miles Giles a pig and live to boast of it in a six-bescellar."

These, M'sieurs, were the ranting words that followed my taunting pleasantry. They came, what is more, from the leader of the pack; a burly knave of an Englishman, whose speech, as you will observe, was studded with strange oaths, and expletives as outlandish as himself.

"No, by my halidom," he bellowed in a passion — a passion not made less violent by a contemptuous smile from me — "no man shall call Miles Giles a pig and not himself be badly stuck. Oddspluts, mates! To the floor with this smirking snail eater!"

"To the floor with him!" echoed the other ten and seven; meaning me, M'sieurs, the modest teller of this tale.

With that they made a concerted onslaught, beside which their opening rush was naught but a minuet. In the center came Miles Giles of Merrie England, while flanking him on all sides were the swashbuckling blades and leering tongues of his seventeen snarling companions.

For the instant, M'sieurs, I confess that I quaked; for after all I am only human. The

Digitized by Google

emotions which sway men, sway me. The fears that men feel, I at times feel also, though mayhap in lesser degree. In short, for the moment, I quaked. Then reflecting that but two more slain would shorten the odds against me to 16 to 1 — something which readily is overcome, as ye know, M'sieurs — I made a lunge at the nearest scamp and — *Mon Dieu!* But for the restraining hand of Isabelle, I should have slid *sans* dignity to the very bottom of the stair case, where even now my assailants were floundering and cursing in a conglomerate heap. And the stairs, M'sieurs — the stairs, from a flight of polished oak steps, had changed in a second to a steep, smooth incline, with neither break nor visible joint from the head of it to the foot.

"*Sacre saucisson de Bologne*!" breathlessly I gasped. "What dark age witchery is this?"

Small thought had I, M'sieurs, that the riddle would be answered, yet answered it was, and by Isabelle at my side.

"No dark age witchery is this, dear heart," she said, with superb coolness — coolness simply marvelous considering the uproar below — "'Tis rather the perfection of modern stair building; a device which shortens considerably the stay of one's boorish guests and gives them in parting *la pêche chute*, as they of Normandy quaintly say."

Digitized by Google

The stairs . . . had changed . . . to a steep, smooth incline.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

I looked at the girl in sheerest wonder.

"And thou, bravest of the fair and fairest of the brave," said I, "Is this thy work?"

I pointed with dripping rapier to the stairs that were, and the baffled gang below.

"Ay," she laughed, with a saucy toss of her head. "And whose else, M'sieur, indeed? For deft effects about the house is not a woman's hand ever responsible? 'T was I who pressed the secret spring, most certainly."

"Isabelle! Incomparable Isabelle!" I began tremulously, mindful for the moment of naught but her.

"No time is this for honeyed words," she interrupted firmly. "Look you, my Alphonse. He who calls himself Miles Giles of England is climbing up the balusters."

Taking from her the piano-lamp, and holding it at arm's length, I flashed its light downward.

"Meet amusement, good sooth, for a grown man," I sneered at the ascending ruffian. "I 'faith, in France, sweet sir, climbing the balusters is deemed an infant's pastime. But choose your transit as ye will — *Parbleu!* The end is the same in any event, and swift to come."

"Oddslidikins, caitiff!" hissed he whom I addressed, "but for the scurvy trick just played by yon staircase, there would have been ere now

Digitized by Google

on that broad landing the deadest swaggerer in all France."

So grimly savage were his tones, to say nothing of the hoarse, growing growl of the men behind him, that Isabelle with a shudder clasped my hand in hers and clung more closely to me.

"Fear not, sweet one," said I, reassuringly. "Yon Creeping Charlie is naught but a loutish braggart, like all of his detestable race. I have but to stand at the head of this balustrade and prick them one by one as they come within my sword's length. *Ma foi!*" — here purposely I raised my voice — "It will be like stringing beads."

"Bah! Gadsobs!" was all the response that came from one Miles Giles of England.

And then, M'sieurs, I noted what I should have seen before; that Miles Giles, half way up the balusters, was but part of a stratagem; a decoy for the time being; a mere means to catch and concentrate my whole attention. When I solved the trick — *Parbleu!* It was too late to do aught but leap back; back out of the way of two falling columns of armed masculinity. The followers of Miles Giles, bandits and cut-throats, were skilled acrobats and tumblers as well. Taking advantage of the dark, for all was pitch dark in the lower hall, two squads of them had mounted on each other's shoulders and

Digitized by Google

fallen up, M'sieurs, the stairs which they could not climb; the topmost villans landing at once but scant three feet in front of me.

"Odds whips and wheels, have at him, mates!" roared Giles from the balusters. "Tilts or tumbling, 't is all one to us, by Gys! Odds-devilkins! Huddup!"

For the moment, I was dismayed by the suddenness of the move, but for the moment only. In the next, Brochette was again Brochette.

"Come closer with the light, sweetheart," to Isabelle I cried, "Come closer or turn it up, else I can not see to carve."

"Mercy! Mercy, M'sieur!" shrieked the next victim of my blade, in agonized terror.

"Mercy!" qoth I. "What mercy shall a tumbler have who would take unawares a fall out of d'en Brochette? None, sirrah!"

And breaking his feeble guard, I drove my flashing steel, not through that man alone, but through him directly behind.

I weary you, I fear, M'sieurs, with these bare commonplaces, these dull details of a life lived every day. Protest not politely to the contrary; 't is to Frenchmen I am talking. Let this then be sufficient: In scarce ten minutes, by Isabelle's Swiss hour glass, I despatched upon the journey whence no traveler returneth all but

Digitized by Google

two of my loutish enemies. Upon one of the latter I was busily engaged, even preoccupied, pressing him back, back to the carven wainscotting, finally spitting him, when —

"S'death!" hissed a voice at my elbow. "Odds blushes and blooms! Yield thee!"

Parbleu! For the first time since the fracas began, I was at a disadvantage, but by other eyes than mine was my peril discerned. Isabelle had seen, and seeing, acted.

"Die, English muffin!" she cried, and using the piano lamp as a knight's lance of old, she caught Miles Giles beneath his bearded chin and neatly severed his jugular.

"S'blood!" he roared in fury, rolling limply down the erstwhile stairs, and then at the foot we heard him murmur weakly:

"Pishtush, m'lord. What mummery is this!"

Miles Giles of Merrie England, M'sieurs, was taking his last wander in his mind.

Now, when we were safe at last and there was need no longer for parry and thrust, reaction seized me and I felt so weak that I staggered. Moreover, the lamp went out when it struck Miles Giles, and the ensuing darkness did not aid me to recover.

"It was going out anyway, sweetheart," said Isabelle, through the blackness. "In sooth,

Digitized by Google

"Die, English muffin!" she cried.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

't was beginning to sputter e'en when I did strike."

"My preserver!" I answered trembling, reaching her at last. "Though as yet I can not see thy face, I swear before thee on bended knee that that lamp henceforth shall be more precious to Brochette than ever Aladdin's was to him. Where we go, it shall go. Where we dwell, it shall dwell. And if by fortune's favor, I shall ever amass vast wealth in gold and estates, no chateau shall be too imposing, no apartment too rich in furnishings, to deprive yon lamp — wherever it is at this black moment — of the place of honor."

"But first, my sweet," whispered Isabelle in reply, "I must make for it a new shade. The present one, I fear me, is a trifle passé. And now," she added brightly, "let me lead you out of this — this chamber of horrors."

"Of joys, sweetheart, since *you* are here," I gently corrected.

She answered with a pressure of the hand, and led on in silence.

"Tell me, dear one," I interposed, "who those ruffians were who so boorishly disturbed us this night!"

"I know not, Alphonse," the girl replied.

"But what came they for!"

"That, also, I know not, Alphonse."

Digitized by Google

"But why, sweetheart," I persisted, "should they ever have come at all?"

Again Isabelle made answer:

"Alphonse, once more must I say that I know not, unless—"

"Yes, my pearl, unless—"

"Unless 't is because," she ventured, "we live in historical times."

Feeling our way down a back and obscure stairway — one unequipped with the patent folding device — we reached at last the villa garden and beheld the gray of dawn.

Digitized by Google

PUBLISHER'S NOTE.

IT is with regret that we have to announce a failure upon the part of the three collaborating authors of this romance, historical though it be, to agree upon the tenor of the concluding chapter of their story. We are compelled, with apologies to the reader, to print all three versions of the conclusion as they have been supplied to us. The situation is a novel one and we are not aware that there is any precedent by which we may be governed in the matter, and the solution of the difficulty that we have chosen seems to be the only, as well as the shortest way, out of a disagreeable complication.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XIII.

In which M'sieur d'En Brochette Brings to a Close the First Volume of His Incomparable Memoirs.

By Bert Leston Taylor.

FOR THE third time within the brief space of forty-eight hours I took an account of stock, and found myself no better off, in a worldly way, than at the beginning of my last series of adventures. Still did I possess my health, a sword, and my family name; but to the debit side of the ledger was added a beautiful woman, soon to be my wife; an extravagant beauty, too, if one might judge by her gowns and jewels.

Before the world I was, it is true, Duke des Pommes de Terre au Gratin, master of broad acres and coffers of gold; but with the relic of the real Duke still in existence, and pursuing me with implacable passion, I had no mind for further masquerade.

In the days of which I write, M'sieurs, there was but one employment for a centimeless gentleman — his sword. Now, in all France

Digitized by Google

was there no more honest and industrious swordsman than myself, and whether I worked by the hour or the piece, I put my heart into my employ and gave good value for every franc of remuneration. But at the ruling wage, even for skilled workmen, I could not hope to maintain in luxury a wife so highly born as Isabelle, and the highest class of work, the unmasking of conspiracies against the King, usually rewarded with a title and a great sum of money, was distributed by chance, and as often as not fell to the least deserving. The morrow, the week, might bring me such employ. But the day, the instant, pressed. I was without a sou, and Isabelle's suggestion of breakfast threw me into a profound melancholy.

As we left the villa, deserted save for the stiffening corpses on the stair, I hailed a passing fiacre and bade the charioteer drive to the nearest café, promising him an extra thrust from my rapier if he made haste. In the preoccupation induced by the state of my finances and my solicitude for Isabelle, who was sleeping soundly on my shoulder, I did not remark the direction in which we were proceeding. Presently the fiacre stopped, and looking out I beheld the café in which I had left the Duchess. An ambulance was backed up at the curb and a great crowd was gathered.

Digitized by Google

"Ho, varlet, . . . inquire the cause of this blockade."

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

"What is wrong, Alphonse?" murmured Isabelle, sleepily. "An ambuscade?"

"Nay, sweetheart; an ambulance. Ho, varlet," to the driver, "inquire the cause of this blockade."

The fellow departed on his errand and returned with the news that a lady had dropped dead in the café, some hours before, of heart disease.

"Her name, scoundrel!" I cried, a great hope leaping within me. "Did'st learn her name?"

"*Oui, M'sieur,*" he replied. "The unfortunate lady was the Duchess des Pommes de Terre au Gratin."

My tale is done. 'T is the story of two days in a lifetime of romance, much of it historical — the first volume of my incomparable memoirs.

I take leave of you now as the Duke des Pommes de Terre au Gratin, husband of the new and beautiful Duchess Isabelle, Chatelaine of Castle Brochette — a name that piques the curiosity of all France, which marvels whence and why I chose it.

How in one fleeting year I was widowed, and careless of life sought balm for my great

Digitized by Google

grief in the wars the King waged against all Europe; how I fought under Condé and turned the sword aimed at his heart in the thick of the conflict; how in my King's fourth war I undertook a perilous mission in his behalf that led me to Madrid, and how I became the husband of the glorious Inez of Arragon, — these things, M'sieurs, will be found set down in succeeding volumes of memoirs, sold only by subscription. Permit me to recommend the set in half-levant, edition de luxe, each copy of which is numbered.

M'sieurs, I drink your good health, and for the time — adieu!

[The End.]

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XIII.

In which Appear Two Portraits, Plus a Family Heirloom.

By Arthur H. Folwell.

A PAIR OF centuries, plus several years, glide swiftly away.

"And is this his picture, Grandpa; really and truly!" asked a grave-faced boy of a bent old man.

"Yes, Brochette," the old man responded. "This is his picture, really and truly."

They were standing, these two, before the portrait of a Gentleman; a quaint portrait, and, moreover, the portrait of an exceptionally quaint person, judged by modern standards. A plumed hat, wide of brim, sat jauntily upon a luxuriance of fine hair, while below the haughty, striking face and its crisp, challenging moustachios was a ruff like a fluted grindstone, which rested proudly, even arrogantly, upon the Gentleman's broad shoulders.

Opposite this portrait there hung on the wall another; the portrait of a Lady. The Lady, also, wore a plumed hat, wide of brim,

Digitized by Google

and her hair, though differently arranged, was quite as abundant as the Gentleman's. Besides, and again like her framed companion, she was seen emerging from a ruff. The patrician character, both of the Lady and the Gentleman, no one who saw the portraits—newly come fresh from a skilled restorer—could question for a an instant.

"Yes, Brochette," the old man repeated, "this is his portrait, and that is hers. They are your honored ancestors; yours and mine; the layers of our family's foundation in America."

The boy regarded them with wondering respect.

"I've heard it," he said, "a great many times, but I can not remember, somehow, more than half of it now. Let me see. This was Mr. and Mrs. Huevospasadaparagua, wasn't it, Grandpa?"

The old man smiled—as who could help?

"Not Mr. and Mrs., Brochette," said he, gently chiding. "Say rather, Huevos Pasada par Agua, Count of Paté de Fois Gras and Marquis presumptive of the estates of Pollio Grill in Spain, and Isabelle, his wife."

The old man, small need to add, had a Family Tree of no mean girth—a veritable lord, in fact, of the Forest Genealogical.

"And when they came to America," the

Digitized by Google

little fellow continued, "did they come in the first cabin, Grandpa, with a stateroom way up high on the promenade deck, like the one we had last summer?"

"Yes, yes," said the other, absently. "Or rather, no. The promenade deck was not for those times, my boy. Our family's founder and his charming bride had a stateroom, I dare say, near the stern-post, with the rudder chains creaking and clanking near their heads. But I do not know; I do not know, Brochette. Your Gran'dad, sir, is getting old and forgetful."

"But tell me. When did Mr.—I mean our family's founder—first meet Mrs.—I should say, that is—er—our family's foundress?"

"The beauteous Isabelle, no doubt you mean, my boy. Ah!" said his grandfather. "That was what they called her: The beauteous Isabelle! She was married, I believe, somewhat hastily to the Count. There are blanks in our family history which no one now can fill, and one of them occurs unfortunately at the very period of their nuptials. The elaborate wedding feast and ceremony seem in this case, to have been strangely omitted.

"The story is told of the Count and Isabelle that they traveled in great haste to Paris from somewhere or other and thence to Calais, pursued for some reason, it is said, by an in-

Digitized by Google

furiated dame. Who this woman was and why she pursued them, there is no record left to show. I know only of the pursuit; and remember seeing in my boyhood an old journal of the Count's, written in French, wherein the strange woman's rage was described with graphic humor. She stood, it seems, on the dock at Calais and shook her fist wildly at the departing ship, screaming and ranting the while in impotent fury."

"How funny!" cried the boy. "I should like to have been there, grandpa; would n't you?"

"On the ship, perhaps, my boy, but not on the dock," was the old man's prudent comment.

"Oh, grandpa," then exclaimed the child, a new thought striking him suddenly, "haven't you got in your big cabinet anything to remember them by? Something they left, you know."

"You have hit upon my life puzzle, Brochette," said he, gravely. "Come."

Leading the way to the lighted library, he unlocked a drawer and from it withdrew a small, carved box. Within it lay a tiny package, silken in its wrappings. The latter, outspread, disclosed to view a dry speck of something — something round and hard like a bit of baked clay.

"And what is it, Grandpa?" asked the boy, wonderingly.

Digitized by Google

The old man shook his head.

"It was his," said he, pointing to the Portrait of a Gentleman; "but what it is I can not tell. This goes with it — it is his handwriting."

The boy looked at the now faded parchment and read hesitatingly:

> Found by Isabelle in the pocket of my best hose, five days out of Calais, aboard the good ship, Mayonnaise. 'T would seem as though I ne'er could lose it.

They laid the thing on the library table and regarded it together.

"Why, I tell you what it looks like, Grandpa," the boy said, laughingly, "It looks just like a mole that came off."

The old man smiled at this flash of childish fancy.

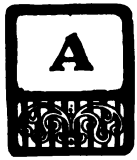
[The End.]

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XIII.

In Which Our Hero Sees His Finish

By John Kendrick Bangs.



LAS, that I, Huevos Pasada Par Agua, should have to recall the dire misery of that which was to follow. Has ever a gallant heart been called upon to narrate such woeful happenings as now befell? I trow not; and yet, from the beginning of these Memoirs to this, the end, I have swerved not from the path of truth. Destiny, human destiny, is a thing that man may not evade, and here in my last chapter must be set down the terrible story of defeat at the moment of triumph — yet what a happy death — but I anticipate.

It was into a cold gray dawn that Isabelle and I, our enemies, the hireling swashbucklers of an unidentified foe, laid low in death, now escaped. The garden was deserted, save by an occasional tree-toad who sent up his melancholy song to greet the dawning day, and no impediment to a happy ending to the troublous courtship of my love seemed to intervene — but who can tell what the future hath in store! Stand-

Digitized by Google

ing on the brink of happiness, the next moment my beloved companion and I were hurled into eternity.

With the fleet foot of the hind we sped down the path, to the gate issuing upon the highway to Paris and the nuptial hour, when suddenly with a crackling sound and a sudden crash the ground gave way beneath our feet, and ere we knew what had come about, the fair lady and I had fallen into a deep pit half filled with water whose depth went down and down and down into the abysmal bowels of the earth.

"Help, my Huevos!" came the startled cry from Isabelle as she sank into the turgid waters. "I am sink—"

The appeal was never finished, a mere gurgle blotting out forever that beloved voice.

Frenzied with my impotence to help her I too went under, and, foregad, it seemed as though I ne'er should rise again. But my moment was not yet come, for with a few strokes of my arms, and kicks with my heels, I came again to the scum-covered surface of the pool, where I called right lustily for help. A mocking laugh was the sole answer, and I was thrust under by a garden rake in the hands of one whom through the growing light of day I perceived to be none other than the deserted true Duchess of Pommes de Terre.

Digitized by Google

"By the sacred tooth of Navarre," I gurgled as I went down the second time, "if Isabelle and I unwed must rest our bones forever at the bottom of this slimy pool, no future age shall make scandal of the fact, for we shall not go to death unchaperoned."

With which, reaching upward, I seized the rake's end and with one dexterous jerk pulled the unwieldly Duchess herself into the pit, shrieking and imploring Heaven to save her to the end.

Again, because of this movement, I rose to the surface, perceiving the Duchess floundering down past me, as sputtering I once more breathed, my head well above the waters. But, alas, no more breath was left me to call again for help, and for the third and last time I sank—down, down, down into the depths never to rise again, but to rest through all eternity by the side of my heart's best treasure, my Isabelle.

A dreadful end in truth; but what could be happier than that cool grot, far removed from the turmoil of life, beside the form of her I loved so true, there to lie until that last dread day when all are summoned before the judgment seat? A kindly fate let my now lifeless corpse down to the spot where that of Isabelle lay still and strangely beautiful, and then—the end. I was no more! The Duchess caught some twenty feet under upon a shelving rock, so that no dis-

Digitized by Google

I pulled the unwieldy Duchess herself into the pit.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

cordant intrusion on our death-embrace was ever to be feared.

Gentle reader, 't was two hundred years before our bleaching bones were found by dredgers clearing away the pool. By them the romance of our days was well respected, for instead of parting us, as well they might have done, our bones were tenderly placed elsewhere, and together; and that is why you, in passing through the Convent yard of Mére la Chaise, will see to-day one small mound marked by a simple stone upon which are inscribed the words:

LES AMANTS INCONNUS
FOUND DROWNED.

It is the grave, dear reader, of the lovely Isabelle and myself, Robert Gaston de Launay Alphonse, Marquis of Paté de Foie Gras and Heir Presumptive to the Estate of Huevos Pasada par Agua in old Castile.

[THE END.]

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

This book should be returned
the Library on or before the last
stamped below.
A fine of five cents a day is incu
by retaining it beyond the spec
time.
Please return promptly.

Digitized by Google